

Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Edited by Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen



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Contents

Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: An Introduction <i>Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen</i>	1
The Remembrance of the Deceased in the Traditional Polish Culture of the Middle Ages <i>Beata Wojciechowska</i>	32
Deviant Burials: Societal Exclusion of Dead Outlaws in Medieval Norway <i>Anne Irene Riisøy</i>	49
Parental Grief and Prayer in the Middle Ages: Religious Coping in Swedish Miracle Stories <i>Viktor Aldrin</i>	82
Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife: Readings of the Poem <i>De Vita Hominis</i> in Pre-Reformation and Post-Reformation Denmark <i>Eivor Andersen Oftestad</i>	106
Dicing towards Death: An Oracle Game for Miners at the Falun Copper Mine from the Early Seventeenth Century <i>Iris Ridder</i>	129
“To Help the Deceased Guild Brother to His Grave”: Guilds, Death and Funeral Arrangements in Late Medieval and Early Modern Norway, ca. 1300–1900 <i>Håkon Haugland</i>	152
Post-Mortem – an Afterword <i>Ditlev Tamm</i>	184
List of Contributors	191
List of Illustrations	193

Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: An Introduction¹

Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen

University of Turku

This volume investigates certain aspects of medieval and early modern mentalities related to death in Europe, exploring some of the expressions of the European cultures of dying: customary beliefs, social practices and values related to death and dying that were shared by the people of medieval and early modern Europe. To a large extent, the Church and religion left its hallmark on this culture, defining it and giving it substance. Medieval canon law also regulated interment and who had the right to be buried in hallowed ground.²

However, we have chosen to talk about cultures in the plural to emphasize that there were parallel cultures and customs aside from the prevalent Catholic one in the Middle Ages. There was divergence and variation depending on status, social group, ethnicity, age, religion and so on, in addition to inevitable regional variations. After the Reformation, the new Evangelical churches started to form their own sets of beliefs and customs on the basis of the common Christian background while revising or abandoning some central tenets. This created more parallel cultures.

The volume deals with issues related to the Christian ideal of good death (Lat. *mors beata*).³ This notion had corollaries in terms of strategies of salvation and coping with death emotionally. The Church also influenced the material preparations

1 The editors wish cordially to thank the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies and the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, which enabled the organizing of the conference “Preparing for Death in Medieval and Early Modern Europe” that formed the general inspiration for this volume. In addition, thanks are due to Maija Väättämoinen and the editorial board of the COLLeGIUM for their seamless cooperation. The editors would like to wish to extend their gratitude to the many anonymous readers who generously shared their expertise, helped to improve the articles and thereby made this a higher-quality volume. Alfons Puigarnau also kindly commented on earlier drafts of the essays. Mia Korpiola would like to acknowledge the friendly staff of the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, which has been an inspiring environment in which to write this introduction. She would also like to thank Dominique Bauer and Rod McConchie for suggestions concerning literature.

2 E.g., *Liber extra* [hereafter X] 3.28.1–14; *Liber sextus*, 3.12.1–5 both in *Corpus iuris canonici* 2, ed. Friedberg (1881).

3 About *mors beata* in, for example, the early modern Nordic context, see, e.g., Stenberg 1998.

for death and rituals of treating the dead body. A key tenet formulated in the high Middle Ages was the notion that the individual is responsible for his or her actions in life. This religious worldview revolved around the idea of salvation based on individual merit – both sins and good deeds. Souls were destined either to heaven or hell, depending on how the individual had behaved during life. The emergence of the doctrine of purgatory (between ca. 1150–1250) as a waiting place for souls to be cleansed by divine fire for their sins between death and the Final Judgement meant that the intercessions of the saints and the living for the souls in purgatory were very welcome.⁴

The Reformation changed many of these teachings. However, as several of the following articles point out, the devolution was not always abrupt. Instead, old concepts and practices were negotiated and given a new context. The social functions of rituals and customs helped to preserve them regardless of religious changes. From this perspective, combining medieval and early modern, Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the same volume makes perfect sense as it will help to make insightful comparisons across time and space.

The Universality and Unpredictability of Death and Emotional Responses to It

In medieval and early modern European society, Death, the Grim Reaper, was a recurrent and omnipresent guest. The Biblical metaphor from Jeremiah (9:22) likens the falling of human corpses to dung on the ground or hay behind the back of the reaper.⁵ The image of mowing hay or grain was familiar to medieval and early modern people, as was the visualisation of Death as a reaper with a scythe. Epidemics, malnutrition and warfare took their toll of the human population and, in the mid-fourteenth century, the Black Death spread terror that reinforced the images of death in art and folklore. Even in times of peace, death was a regular visitor in families, and especially ruthless when wrenching infants from their parents' arms.

When the Parisian lawyer Nicolas Versoris started to write a journal in 1519, his first entry was about his marriage. The next entry recorded the demise of a Parisian advocate.⁶ In fact, during the following decade until 1530, Versoris made dozens of entries on the deaths of members of his family, lawyers, executed criminals and members of the royal house and aristocracy.⁷ He noted the passing away of his

4 Le Goff 1981, esp. 14–26, 178–447.

5 In the Latin Vulgate version: *“loquere haec dicit Dominus et cadet morticinum hominis quasi stercus super faciem regionis et quasi faenum post tergum metentis et non est qui colligat.”* In King James's Version of the Bible, the English rendering is: “Speak, Thus saith the LORD, Even the carcases of men shall fall as dung upon the open field, and as the handful after the harvestman, and none shall gather them.”

6 *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*, ed. Joutard (1963), 27.

7 *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*, ed. Joutard (1963), *passim*.

first wife Marie, the demise of Princess Charlotte of France (1516–1524), as well as the deaths of his own three children: first his son and a couple of years later his daughter, who both breathed their last the day they were born. Another daughter lived fifteen days.⁸

Although Versoris's entries tended to be laconic, barely noting their demise, this did not mean that the death of so many of his family members and in-laws left him indifferent. He occasionally wrote something on the personality or the life of the deceased, as in noting the death of his mother-in-law in 1520: "She was a good, honest and virtuous woman."⁹ However, if Versoris made any comment on the death, it was more often a wish for the salvation of the soul of the dead. After the loss of his first wife within three days after she had fallen ill with the plague, he added on a personal note: "I pray God that he will pardon and show mercy to her poor soul."¹⁰

Emotions expressed by Versoris were echoed by many other people who have left records from the medieval and early modern period. Although people may have been more used to the omnipresence of death, they were far from being unmoved in the face of it. Both the death of individuals and mass death affected people. During one of the recurrent carnages of the Armagnac-Burgundian Civil War (1407–1435), an eye-witness wrote that the streets of Paris were littered by the corpses of some hundreds of people. Indeed, "[t]hey were heaped up in piles in the mud like sides of bacon – a dreadful thing, it was."¹¹

Then, just as now, death stirred many feelings: grief, a sense of bereavement, relief, and so on. Both men and women spontaneously expressed their inconsolable loss.¹² William the Conqueror, King of England (r. 1066–1087), was described in a chronicle as having been "weeping most profusely for many days" for his wife after her demise, which demonstrated "how keenly he felt [her] loss."¹³

Attitudes towards male demonstrations of grief may have changed in the course of the later Middle Ages. Society came to view violent passions caused by strong emotions like grief with wariness as potentially disruptive powers that had to be channeled and restrained by the more decorous rituals of mourning. When King Louis IX of France (r. 1226–1270), the future saint, heard about the death of his mother, he is reported to have fallen down with grief. However, he was reproached for demonstrating his sorrow and feelings too strongly in the presence of his subjects.¹⁴ This suggested a difference between private moments of unrestrained distress and public displays of more sedate grief.

8 *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*, ed. Joutard (1963), 34, 38–39, 50–51, 72, 119.

9 *Ibid.*, 31: "*Elle estoit bonne, honneste et vertueuse femme.*"

10 *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*, ed. Joutard (1963), 38–39: "*Je prie Dieu qu'il aist fait pardon et mercy à sa pauvre ame.*"

11 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley (1968), 114.

12 E.g., Le Roy Ladurie 1987, 206, 210–213.

13 Daniell 1997, 54.

14 Binski 1996, 51.



Picture 1. This German fifteenth-century stained glass shows the Virgin and Saint John in tears at the crucifixion. In the course of the Middle Ages, crying was increasingly considered to be an unmanly thing to do in public.

In the course of the high Middle Ages, the uncontrollable demonstrations and outbursts of grief that had been associated with the epic masculine laments of knightly culture were increasingly perceived as unmanly expressions of feminine passion and thus unsuitable for men. Consequently, many thirteenth- and fourteenth-century communities in Italy went so far as to legislate on expressions of grief and forbid the unseemly emotional outbursts of mourners on pain of punishment. The orderly town depended on self-possessed citizens who maintained decorum in the face of calamity. Consequently, appearing bareheaded, clapping, tearing one's own hair or clothing and ripping at one's own face as a sign of grief, became punishable by a fine by law. While crying was tolerated, public wailing and loud crying was penalised even if lamentations were permitted indoors. Noisy public mourning – this seems largely to have been an elite male custom – was targeted, and some communes even enforced these criminalisations. “Stability required male emotional restraint and decorum.”¹⁵

Even in places in which expressions of grief were not restricted by law, it was more socially acceptable that women, considered more emotional and unrestrained, should display spontaneous emotion and ritual wailing both at the deathbed as well as after death. In some Italian regions, professional female mourners were hired.¹⁶ However, in certain cases even widows could be perceived as too sorrowful. When Ludovic Stewart (1574–1624), Duke of Lennox and Richmond, died suddenly in 1624, Lady Frances Howard (1578–1639), his now widowed third wife, was said to have cut off her hair at her husband's death and performed “divers other

15 Lansing 2008, esp. 53–98, quotation 187.

16 Le Roy Ladurie 1987, 223–224; Lansing 2008, 63–64.

demonstrations of extraordinary grief.” After his funeral, the Duchess of Richmond thoroughly mourned her third husband whom she had married only two months after her second husband’s death and now lost after less than three years of marriage. But she did it:

so impatiently and with so much show of passion that many odd and idle tales are daily reported or invented of her, insomuch that many malicious people impute it as much to the loss of the court as of her Lord, and will not be persuaded that having buried two husbands already and being so far past the flower and prime of her youth she could otherwise be so passionate.¹⁷

Even if adults were supposed to master their emotions and display moderate grief, this probably did not apply children, who could feel the loss deeply when bereft of one or both of their parents. In 1673, little Gertrud Fleming, deeply upset by the death of her father, Baron Herman Fleming (1619–1673), was reported to have wept and wailed for her father for many days, until the emotional jolt gave her fever, which led to her own death.¹⁸ And even if the first shock of bereavement was over, it was often followed by lifelong sorrow and feelings of loss. In the memoirs of the aristocratic Agneta Horn (1629–1672), the seventeenth-century Swedish protagonist lamented the fate of a motherless child left at the mercy of hard relatives. Agneta’s mother and little brother died of disease and lack of proper care in the chaotic conditions of the Thirty Years’ War. Agneta wistfully compared her childhood and teenage under the eye of a scolding aunt to that of her peers who had the benefit of a living and caring mother. She recorded hearing that some people would have rather seen her dead instead of her brother, and also described herself as in constant fear of losing relatives such as her maternal grandmother who loved and cherished her. Agneta Horn’s memoirs are highly partial and often vehement about many of her relatives, so one should not take all her recollections at face value; however, her text still reflects the thoughts and experiences of a person who, in spite of a high societal position, lived with the feeling of loss and fear of losing more people around her.¹⁹

The keen sense of loss is palpable in, for instance, the notebook of Duke Charles, later Charles IX of Sweden (1550–1611). Many a time did he write down the happy news of the birth of his offspring, organised their christening festivities and wrote down his hopes for the future of the child, or praised the Lord for his grace, having come home and found his spouse and children wealthy and safe.²⁰ Very often, however, he had the sad task of writing down the date of death of his beloved children, making references to his “sorrow and grief,” although consoling

17 Gittings 1984, 192–193.

18 Personalia Öfwer Högwålborne Herr Herman Flemming friherre til Libelitz, herre til Wilnäs. samt dess K: dotter Jungfru Gertrud Flemming.

19 Horn 1961 (1656), 15, 30–31, 39–40, 53.

20 *Calendaria Caroli IX*, ed. Lewenhaupt (1903), 24–25, 41, 43, 73, 75, 76, 79.

himself with their resurrection.²¹ In 1589, he lost one of his daughters and his wife and described mournfully how his dear spouse was laid in the grave with many beloved departed children. Being left alone with only one surviving daughter, he wrote down his wish that he could soon join his wife. Then, however, he turned to God for consolation:

God Almighty be thanked and praised for his grace in good times and bad times alike. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the Name of the Lord, may he give me patience in all my sorrow.²²

Indeed, research has indicated that bereavement and the death of one's children, spouses and close relatives led to melancholy and depression for medieval and early modern people just as now. However, the hope of a reunion in Paradise and the religious doctrines provided consolation. Resignation in the face of death was a strategy of coping with inevitability.²³

Loss felt by parents is also discussed by Viktor Aldrin in his analysis of parental grief in light of Swedish miracle stories. In "Parental Grief and Prayer in the Middle Ages: Religious Coping in Swedish Miracle Stories," Aldrin discusses stories that record accidents that happened to children, the parents' immediate reactions and attempts to cope with the situation in which their beloved child was supposedly dead. Aldrin considers the phases of parental grief from the first shock and disbelief to starting to let go of the deceased child, organising the funeral.

Aldrin observes that there was less gendered difference in the expressions of grief in the parents of the dead children in Sweden than on the Continent and Britain, as both Swedish fathers and mothers cried. The study by Carol Lansing suggests that earlier Italian miracle stories depicted even men wailing and crying loudly at the loss of close relatives before the expressions of grief permitted for Italian men were transformed in the later Middle Ages.²⁴ Thus, emotions were universal, but their manifestations were culturally determined and changed over time.

In the midst of their deep sorrow, the Swedish parents were partly directing their thoughts to funeral preparations, but partly still resisting what had happened, praying to the saints for a miracle. Demonstrating the intensity of love and grief, the narratives analysed by Aldrin describe fervent prayers for a miracle, divine intervention that would restore the loved one to life. These stories reveal the sorrow and reactions of grieving parents in general, although they have an unusually happy ending through the miraculous deliverance of the children from death.

21 "[M]edh sårgh och bedröffuelse", *Calendaria Caroli IX*, ed. Lewenhaupt (1903), 18, 20, 39–41, 43, 52, 63, 71.

22 "Ten alzmachtige gudh ware tack och låff för sine nåder både för mott och medh, herren gaff och herren togh, welsignett ware herrens namn och förläne migh tålemodh i all min bedröffuelse," *Calendaria Caroli IX*, ed. Lewenhaupt (1903), 65–66.

23 E.g., Laurence 1989, 62–76.

24 Lansing 2008, 88–93.

Such extraordinary resurrections from death to life could also occasionally be witnessed in other instances as well. For example, in 1528, a score of Parisians testified as eye-witnesses when a criminal was resuscitated after having been hanged for half an hour when his body was cut down and put on a wagon. His amazing return to life was considered by the onlookers as a miracle by the will of God and the Virgin Mary. It was attributed to the fact that the condemned, swearing to his innocence of the homicide he was accused of, had wished to deliver a speech to honour the Virgin Mary. This oration had been interrupted by the hangman. While this was hailed as a miracle by the people and the young man was pardoned by the king because of the intervention of the Virgin, at least some thought that the executioner had simply done a botched job.²⁵ Such miracles could also result in canonisation processes as Robert Bartlett has mentioned: the hanging and resurrection of the Welsh criminal William Cragh in 1290 became evidence in the canonisation investigations of Thomas de Cantilupe (ca. 1218–1282) in 1307.²⁶

Leaving emotional aspects aside, the imminence of death required people to prepare for the possibility of dying. A person could be here one moment, gone the next, suddenly as by a thunderbolt just as happened to a man quite literally during a thunderstorm in Paris in 1409. The other afflicted man had only been “knocked senseless,” surviving the unexpected stroke of lightning.²⁷ The unpredictability of fate and the fickleness of Fortune was also a well-known late medieval *topos* in art and literature. Life was aleatory and its duration could neither be known nor influenced. The famous poem *Fortuna Imperatrix mundi* (Fortune, Empress of the World) in the *Carmina Burana* collection (number 17), describes how fate plays with the lives of people. Fortune was as changeable as the moon. Fate could suddenly melt away both poverty and power like ice as the cruel and inane destiny turned the wheel of fortune.²⁸ The anonymous chronicler of Paris described how Thomas Montacute, Earl of Salisbury (1388–1428), died as a consequence of a cannon shot at the age of forty in 1428: “Fortune, to none a faithful friend, showed him how she can behave without warning to those who trust her [...]”²⁹ Similarly, when the chronicler accounted the accidental drowning of Thomas, Baron de Ros (1406–1430), together with some other nobleman and soldiers in 1430, he wrote that “Fortune was unkind to him.”³⁰

The transience of life had also an effect on art. The wheel of fortune (*rota fortunae*) was a popular topic in late-medieval art. It usually depicts a king in the

25 *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*, ed. Joutard (1963), 122–123, 178–180.

26 Bartlett 2004.

27 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley (1968), 50–51.

28 “O Fortuna,/ velut luna/ statu variabilis [...] egestatem/ potestatem/ dissolvit ut glaciem/ [...] Sors immanis/ et inanis/ rota tu volubilis [...]”, quoted from Lehtonen 1995, 110.

29 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley (1968), 226.

30 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley (1968), 251. For a contrary example, see *ibid.*, 350.

four stages of the wheel of fortune. First he is on his way up, to govern in the future. Then, after reigning and having reigned, the king loses his reign and becomes earth. The wheel of fortune showed in a very illustrative way how even the potentates of the world were merely hapless pawns in the game of fortune in life and death.³¹



Picture 2. The wheel of fortune, a popular topos in the later Middle Ages, demonstrated the fickleness of fate. The ruler is shown at different stages with the accompanying texts: *Regnabo* (I will rule), *Regno* (I am ruling), *Regnavi* (I ruled) and, for the corpse under the wheel, *Sum sine regno* (I am without a reign).

The *ubi sunt* ("where are") genre in literature called to mind the whereabouts of those who were already dead. The great men and women of the past or the former comrades of one's youth had already been eaten by worms and had become dust.

³¹ Lehtonen 1995, 73–122.

For example, the epic poem *Beowulf*, written in Old English and preserved to our days in a single manuscript (British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A XV) from ca. 1000, contains a lament about the loss of a warrior's entourage and men through death.³² Late medieval mentalities were attuned to the cultures of death by the vicissitudes of the time: the Black Death, recurrent epidemics and warfare. In the Middle Ages, a whole form of literature, the *ars moriendi*, instructing people about the way of dying properly, developed for the use of the clergy and laity alike. Some *ars moriendi* versions recalled of the mortality of all, high and low alike, who all were "under the hand and will of Almighty God." "We all, regardless of our position, popes, emperors, archbishops, kings, high or low, rich and poor, have to die. We have all come to here to this world like pilgrims so that we are to leave it."³³

The *memento mori*, remembering one's mortality, became a popular motif in art. The *dance macabre*, with Death leading all sorts of people, rich and poor, young and old, men and women, to the dance, gained in popularity after the Black Death. The *dance macabre* reflected the powerlessness of people in the face of death, the great equaliser. Temporal wealth, power, beauty and youth were fleeting and useless in the face of death. Worldly pursuits were futile and empty in one's last hour as everyone was destined to be a rotting corpse, food for maggots, in the end.³⁴ As the character of Death stated in the morality play *Everyman*:

Lord, I will in the world go run overall,
And cruelly outsearch both great and small.³⁵

The suddenness of death was further highlighted by its most common symbols, arrows, darts or javelins that came suddenly from nowhere and hit the unsuspecting victim.³⁶ While the Dance of Death was a general motif, such images of the universal mortal lot of mankind could also be customised. The tragic and premature death of Duchess Mary of Burgundy (1457–1482) as a consequence of a hunting accident may have led to the commissioning of miniatures of the Duchess

32 "Hold, ground, the gold of the earls! Men could not. Cowards they were not/ but took it from thee once, but war-death took them,/ that stops life, struck them, spared not one/ man of my people, passed on now./ They have had their hall-joys, I have not with me/ a man able to unsheathe this. [...]/ Who shall polish this plated vessel/ this treasured cup? The company is elsewhere./ This hardened helmet healed with gold/ shall lose its shell. They sleep now/ whose work was to burnish the battle-masks; so that the cuirass that in the crash took/ bite of iron among breaking shields:/ it moulders with the man. This mail-shirt travelled far/ hung from a shoulder that shouldered warriors: it shall not jingle again./ There's no joy from harp-play,/ glee-wood's gladness, no good hawk/ swings through the hall now, no swift horse/ tramps at the threshold. Terrible slaughter/ has carried into darkness many kindreds of mankind," *Beowulf*, trans. Alexander (1987), 122.

33 *Gersons lärdom huru man skall dö*, fol. Aiii^v: "[A]th wil ære alle saman liggiande wnder allmectogx gwdz handh ok wnder hans helgha wilia. Ok wi alle saman æ aff hwadh stath wi ære Pawe kesare ærkebiscopar konungar høgha eller lagha fathigha ok rike wi ære alle pliktoge dø. Vi ære kompne hyth y thenne wedhene sa som pelegrimer ath wi skwle wetha fara hædhan."

34 Kurtz 1934; Oosterwijk 2011, 20–41.

35 *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, ed. Cawley (1959), 209.

36 Kurtz 1934, 40–41, 52, 63, 77, 86, 91, 134, 143; Oosterwijk 2011, 26–28.

on horseback, being chased by a mounted corpse, symbolizing Death, armed with a spear. The *topos* of three living young men meeting three dead men on a hunting trip was adapted to include the Duchess and her spouse Maximilian of Austria (1459–1519), the future Emperor Maximilian I. Alternatively, the Duchess had had it commissioned in her lifetime, depicting herself, little knowing that she would be dead in the flower of her life, crushed by her horse after a fall when hawking with her husband.³⁷



Picture 3. The “three living and the three dead” was a well-known topic in later medieval literature and art. The three young men or kings were hunting when they came across the three corpses. These reminded them of the transience of life and of the necessity to prepare for death while living.

Georges Duby has argued that the late medieval culture of the macabre is to be interpreted rather as a sign of an “excessive love of life” than the “real misfortunes of the times” (*traduit moins le malheur réel des temps qu’un excès d’attachement à la vie*). The bigger the passion to live, he argues, the more painful was the bitterness

³⁷ Kralik 2011, 146–154.

of being torn from it.³⁸ Yet, it is hard to imagine that the cruel ravages of war and plagues of various kinds would not have its effects on the collective mindset of people. Chiffolleau talks about a Great Melancholy (*La Grande Mélancholie*) and a deep traumatising.³⁹

It is hardly a coincidence that the first known *danse macabre* mural was painted in 1424–1425 at the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris, a city tortured by famines, pestilence and war for a long time.⁴⁰ The Parisians took their afflictions to be a sign of divine wrath and punishment. Similarly, it can be asked whether the frequency of the representations of the Day of Judgement, the purgatory and the pains of hell in wall paintings in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century churches is coincidental or related to changes in mentality.⁴¹

Indeed, because of the uncertainties of life and the capriciousness of fortune, people had to devise strategies to cope with death. One of these, described by Georges Duby, was to “domesticate” or “tame” death so that it was very rarely perceived as coming as a surprise. According to Duby, one of “its essential characteristics was to give advance warning of its arrival.” Something anticipated became easier to handle and accept.⁴²

Some people, like the inhabitants of Siena, attempted to domesticate death by a sense of manipulating the future through their intricate post-plague testamentary practices. Sienese testators sought increasingly to control the existence of the living after their own death by minutely detailed clauses in their wills. “With complex contingency plans, they sought to dictate events in that previously uncharted geography of time between the day of death and earthly perpetuity.”⁴³ Jacques Chiffolleau has observed that late medieval testators from Southern France tended to see death as a “slow and precise ritual scenario” concentrated especially between the death agony and the return from the cemetery. The stage-like process of dying took as much as a year to complete. In addition, the testators started to dramatise their death by making it – and their funerals – into a spectacle for the rest of society.⁴⁴

38 Duby 1983, 164.

39 Chiffolleau 1980, 205–207, 430–432.

40 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley (1968), 204.

41 Vovelle & Vovelle 1970, 14–16.

42 Duby 1981, 6, 10.

43 Cohn 1988, 67. See also *ibid.*, 140–145.

44 Chiffolleau 1980, 149: “Pour la majorité des testateurs la mort n’est pas un acte instantané; elle se ‘fait’ lentement, dans un scénario rituel précis, qui se concentre entre l’agonie et le retour du cimetière, mais qui dure en fait le plus souvent douze mois, jusqu’au bout-de-l’an. L’idée que le passage dans l’au delà, ou que l’au-delà lui-même, comporte plusieurs étapes, est installée solidement dans les consciences. [...] L’image d’une mort théâtralisée par le testateur lui-même remplace peu à peu celle d’une mort entièrement prise de charge par les parents et les voisins. Au lieu d’être socialisée dans un rite professionnel où la participation de tous est requise, le décès est seulement, et magnifiquement, offert en spectacle au reste de la société.”

However, although people were generally aware of the fickleness of Fortune and attempted to domesticate death, some groups of people were involved in more dangerous activities than others. They needed to form special strategies to control the uncertainty present in their everyday life. As Iris Ridder argues in her article “Dicing towards Death: An Oracle Game for Miners at Falun Copper Mine from the Early Seventeenth Century,” the miners had their own strategies in trying to cope with the unexpected death, *mors improvisa*. Using a little book written for his amusement, a miner would first wish for something, throw three dice, see the score and then find a poem linked to the score. Every poem gave the miner different advice for his life and in regard to his wishes. Ridder gives an example of the ways people in a very hazardous position could try to maintain some feeling of control over their lives – or (rather probable) deaths.

Parallel Cultures of Dying: Christian, Heretical, Pagan and Reformation Challenges

When a person realised that death was close, he or she turned his thoughts to arranging his soul for the afterlife. The omnipresence of imminent death made people invest in their salvation by what the French historian Jacques Chiffolleau has called the “accounting of the afterlife” (*la comptabilité de l’au-delà*). Through the process of the “mathematics of salvation” (*mathématique du salut*), people assessed the necessary sums to be spent on pious causes (*ad pios usus*), including masses, anniversary masses, alms, legacies, wills and donations, to guarantee some relief from the pains of purgatory pending the Last Judgement. They organised their budget for the afterlife.⁴⁵ Preparing for death could also mean worrying about the memory and post-mortem reputation of the dying. This could be done by, for example, preparing or commissioning works of art, effigies, memorials or literary works.

Confession of one’s sins, contrition and making amends were part of the penitential process that was to be concluded before death. Because of this, it was generally presupposed – in law as well – that a man facing death would speak the absolute truth as otherwise his soul risked eternal damnation. In addition to the confession of sins, praying for the dying and extreme unction formed part of the religious deathbed rituals in medieval and early modern Europe. Priests had their own handbooks advising them on how to approach a person on his sickbed and how to console him. The administering of the *viaticum*, the eucharist or communion for the dying, was also central.⁴⁶ Naturally, regional variations also existed. In medieval upper Ariège and many other parts of Western France, Le Roy Ladurie

⁴⁵ Chiffolleau 1980, 212–229, 389–425, 434–435. For such customs, see also, e.g., Daniell 1997, 11–24.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Fallberg Sundmark 2008.

tells us, extreme unction was not part of the normal preparation for death. Instead, confession and communion was what the dying wished for.⁴⁷

Sudden death was perceived as shameful and a threat because the soul could not be prepared for the afterlife in accordance with the cultural understanding of a good death. Moreover, as the ideal death took place at home surrounded by one's family and friends, this was not necessarily the case with sudden death.⁴⁸ However, even a condemned criminal could stage a good death by steadfast devotion, confession, repentance, atonement, mortification of the flesh and meeting the executioner with fortitude.⁴⁹

In addition, both at the deathbed and after death, the rites of passage consoled the living if properly performed. As death was omnipresent and attendance at deathbeds was a feature of every-day life, people internalised the elements of a good death and learned how to stage and prepare for one. However, the *ars moriendi* handbooks also lamented that, through diabolical instigation, people were too confident about still living for a long time, and thus neglected to prepare themselves for death.⁵⁰

The common perceptions involving the mortality of the body and the immortality of the soul define the medieval ecclesiastical culture of death and dying. In Christian belief, the soul of the person left the physical body, which started to decompose at the moment of death. The Catholic theologians rejected the Aristotelian notion that "[o]f all terrible things, the death of the body is the most terrible" as the soul and its salvation were considered much more important. The death of the soul was, indeed, detestable.⁵¹

In addition to the Catholic perceptions of dying, other beliefs and rituals existed in the Middle Ages. Pagan elements existed alongside the Christian – and heretical – cultures of death. Some of these were related to beliefs about spirits and dead bodies. In medieval Montaillou, for example, some believed that through clippings of hair and nails that contained the particularly potent energy of a dead head of the family, this energy could be transmitted into his relatives. Thus, his house would remain fortunate. Neither were dead bodies bathed, their faces only being sprinkled with water, so that nothing essential would be washed away from the skin.⁵² Some also believed that owls flying in the night could in fact be demons on a mission to carry away the souls of the recently dead.⁵³

47 Le Roy Ladurie 1987, 313.

48 E.g., Beier 1989, 56–60; Duby 1981, 10–11, 108.

49 Boyden 1999, 256–261, 265; Beier 1989, 60.

50 Campbell 1995, 18, 21.

51 Campbell 1995, 20–21: "*Omnium terribilium mors corporis sit terribilissima.*"

52 Le Roy Ladurie 1987, 31–33, 42, 61.

53 Le Roy Ladurie 1987, 42.

In her article, “The Remembrance of the Deceased in the Traditional Polish Culture of the Middle Ages,” Beata Wojciechowska investigates the interaction between pagan and Christian cultures of death and dying. She discusses beliefs and ideas about the other world and ancient Slavic conceptions that were present in local belief systems even centuries after initial Christianisation. She analyses the remaining fragments of the pre-Christian concepts of the afterlife, emphasising the efforts of the living to secure the well-being of their deceased ancestors. The souls of the dead were taken care of according to old traditions, and were commemorated and even called on during many Christian festivities, such as All Soul’s and Pentecost. Traditional celebrations reflected the belief that the souls of the dead were present among the living. Although the Church opposed these practices, many continued for centuries, removed from the once coherent systems and partly assimilated to Christian teachings.

Some Christian burial customs, discussed below in more detail, also had superstitious and popular significance. For example, the vigil over the dead from the moment of death to burial and the accompanying prayers and sprinkling of holy water not only eased the soul’s stay in purgatory, but also protected the living as long as the corpse was among them.⁵⁴ Similarly, the ringing of bells was considered to have a protective function by warding off demons. This was why some Puritans dismissed bell-ringing at funerals as superstitious.⁵⁵

Some sects, such as the Cathars, labelled heretics and persecuted by the Church, presented alternative deathbed ideologies and rituals. The Cathars considered the *consolamentum* their only sacrament. The “consoling” purified the believer of the pleasures and sin of the world in order to get closer to God and heaven. The ritual involved the reading of Biblical texts and the “perfect,” the spiritual leader, who had received the *consolamentum* and who observed the regulations of purity, laying his or her hands on the consoled. One of the main duties of the perfect was to console the dying, but the dying had to be conscious of being able to answer the questions posed in the ceremony.⁵⁶ After receiving the *consolamentum* on their death-beds, some Cathars refused food altogether, wishing to accelerate dying in the pure state and to minimise the risk of breaching the duties of the perfect even if fresh water could be drunk after the ritual. This fasting leading to death was called the *endura*, and sometimes even family members watched over the dying lest the fasting be breached and so that death would come in this pure state.⁵⁷

Because of the persecutions, the consolation of the dying had become secret, with few other Cathars present. Sometimes the ceremony had to be hidden from close family members who opposed Cathar beliefs. Some individuals even

54 Harding 1999, 179.

55 Daniell 1997, 53; Gittings 1984, 48–53.

56 Lambert 1998, 239–240.

57 Le Roy Ladurie 1987, 211–212, 218–220, 223–230; Lambert 1998, 240–244.

received both the extreme unction and the *consolamentum*, while others protested against the visit of the local clergyman wishing to administer the last rites.⁵⁸ Thus a covert subculture with secret rites could take place beyond the orthodox Catholic deathbed rituals and the communal vigil at the bedside. On the other hand, some French Huguenots, as the French Protestants were called, did their best to avoid having the Catholic parish priest administer the last rites to them and received the Huguenot ministers in secret. Others alleged that the death had been so sudden that there had not been enough time to send for the Catholic priest, while Huguenot nobles especially wished to preserve their patrimony from confiscation and preserved an outward conformity by accepting the Catholic deathbed rites.⁵⁹

It is also important to be sensitive to the changes in the cultures of death resulting from transitions from the Catholic Middle Ages to Reformation Protestantism. Many of them were quite sudden and very concrete. For example, the Parliament in England forbade purchasing masses for the deceased by law in 1529.⁶⁰ The Protestants also changed “the geography of afterlife”⁶¹ as reformers dismissed as unbiblical both the doctrine of purgatory and the limbo where the souls of unbaptised infants awaited.⁶²

More subtle changes took place in religious literary genres. The *ars moriendi* literature was transformed from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century to reflect various trends: humanism (e.g., by adding classical exempla) and Reformation beliefs (e.g., by attacking certain Catholic customs and doctrines).⁶³ For example, the late medieval *ars moriendi* literature had played upon the uncertainty of salvation and offered consolation accordingly. Vacillating between hope and despair, the lonely dying person, the *moriens*, was to choose the right path to death and to resist temptation in order to maximise the chances of salvation by, for example, good works. However, Reformation theologians rejected the notion of earning one’s salvation, emphasising that Christ had defeated the powers of death, sin and hell for mankind. Faith was foregrounded, as well as joy over the certainty of salvation.⁶⁴

This theme is also further examined in Eivor Andersen Oftestad’s article “Investing in the Afterlife in Medieval and Early Modern Denmark: Two Readings of the Poem *De aetatis hominis*.” The article investigates how the message of the poem (first published in 1514) was later transformed according to the theological rearrangement that followed the new certainty of salvation. Oftestad shows how

58 Lambert 1998, 239–240; Le Roy Ladurie 1987, 223.

59 Roberts 1999, esp. 134–137.

60 Binski 1996, 122.

61 Expression (*géographie de l’au-delà*) of Jacques Le Goff (1981, 10).

62 E.g., Marshall 1999, 112–116.

63 Beaty 1970.

64 Reinis 2007, 243–258.

the poem was not abandoned but re-elaborated by the Danish humanist Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542–1616) in 1571. Originally, the main character had died a lonely death as a consequence of his evil life. As the Reformation emphasised faith, not deeds, even the moral of the poem was changed. While the medieval version underlined the insecurity of salvation, Vedel's version distinguished between evil and pious human beings. Evil consequences faced those who had rejected the Word of God, while the obedient and penitent could be confident of their salvation. Oftestad's analysis provides an intriguing example of how medieval motives were partly maintained, partly re-negotiated in the Reformation period.

Bodies and Burials of the Dead: The Dominant Ecclesiastical Culture of Interment and Examples of Parallel Cultures

This frightening passage from the land of the living to the realm of the dead was perilous for both those who had died and those remaining. Therefore, there had to be a variety of rites of separation, transition and incorporation – as Arnold van Gennep has so perceptively pointed out in his *Les rites de passage* (1909) – ensuring a smooth and successful passing. The souls of the dead had to be made comfortable in the next world so as to prevent them from returning. The risks related to the perilous dead had to be harnessed by first achieving the culturally defined good death and posthumously by performing all the necessary communal rites pertaining to a dignified burial.⁶⁵

Indeed, funeral rituals had a number of functions to fulfil in society. One of the most fundamental of these was to guarantee that the dead are comfortable enough in their dwelling place to leave the living alone and not hinder them in any way. The rites also helped to fill voids left by the death in the family and larger community, a function even more pronounced in the case of dignitaries, and to manifest grief and loss. The transfer of property and status from the deceased to the living was also marked by such rituals. In addition, funerary rituals highlighted “shared kinship and corporate solidarity,” exhibited status and largesse and thus demonstrated or attempted to renegotiate existing social hierarchies.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Van Gennep 1960 (1909), 146–165.

⁶⁶ Houlbrooke 1989a, 1.



Picture 4. Funerals were important status symbols in medieval and early modern Europe. However, some preferred a simple interment due to personal preferences or religious notions. The burial scene is from a French Book of Hour from about 1478.

Funerals were important status indicators. The lavishness of the ceremonies often became an important aim as obsequies were shows of wealth, connection and power. Funeral expenses consequently became the target of sumptuary laws regulating the expenditure and limiting such things as the number of attendants. Such laws already existed in ancient Greece and Rome. As a sign of largesse, funerals could involve the distribution of items of clothing, footwear, and food to

attendants and poor people. A mixture of secular and religious motives was behind such munificence. On the one hand, it was again a display of individual and family wealth. On the other, almsgiving was a pious act, and the recipients were expected to pray for the soul of their deceased benefactor.⁶⁷

The funeral procession, an important rite of passage in itself, was one of the most visual parts of the ceremonies. It was public and meant to be beheld. The more people attending the cortege, the better. The more times the church bells rang for the deceased, the higher his or her status. The place of final repose was also an important status symbol, as burial in church, especially close to the altar, could be reserved for clerics and members of the elite. Candles or torches carried by the participants were an integral part of the funeral procession.⁶⁸ The more torches and the bigger they were, the higher was the status of the deceased, as Håkon Haugland has pointed out in his article “‘To Help the Deceased Guild Brother to His Grave:’ Guilds, Death and Funeral Arrangements in Late-Medieval and Early Modern Norway (c. 1300–1900).”

The procession of a member of a corporation became a show of mutual solidarity and the power of the collective. As Haugland discusses in his article in this volume, mutual aid and the participation of guild members was essential in organizing the funeral for a deceased member of a craft guild. Haugland analyses the mutual help the guilds of late medieval and early modern Norway could provide when one of their members died, and how the Reformation in 1536 changed the role of guilds. One of the consequences of the Reformation was that guilds in the countryside withered away. The continuity, on the other hand, is represented in the role of both medieval and early modern guilds in supporting the burials of the deceased members. Haugland points out that the craft guilds had religious functions both in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period; thus he emphasises the continuity over the Reformation period, challenging the previous outcomes of Norwegian research.

Nevertheless, at the time of war, pestilence or famine, the mortality rates were so high and, in case of disease, the fear of contagion so acute, that the ordinary solemnities had to be forgone and the piles of corpses disposed of with curtailed ceremonies or even without ceremony altogether. During the Black Death, burials had indeed to be curtailed and new plague cemeteries consecrated.⁶⁹ According to Giovanni Boccaccio, writing about Florence during the Black Death: “Nor therefore were the dead honoured with aught of tears or candles or funeral train; nay, the thing was come to such a pass that folk recked no more of men that died than nowadays they would of goats.”⁷⁰

67 E.g., Daniell 1997, 55–57.

68 In general, see Daniell 1997, 44–58; Epstein 1984, 157–158; Gittings 1984, 28–29.

69 Wray 2009, 225–226, 232.

70 Boccaccio 1925 (1348–1353), trans. Payne, 15.

Serious epidemics caused havoc, especially in towns, pre-empting carefully made plans concerning burials and graves. As the anonymous Parisian chronicler reported in the autumn of 1418, towns-dwellers were dying like flies. “[P]eople died as fast as ever. When it got so bad that no one could think where to bury them, huge pits were dug, five at Holy Innocents, four at the Trinity, at the others according to their capacity, and each pit held about six hundred people.”⁷¹ Amidst another bout of the plague in Paris in 1522, Nicholas Versoris recounted how more than forty victims of the pestilence were buried at the cemetery of the Innocents alone on a single day.⁷² As Boccaccio reported in his *Decamerone* of Florence during the Black Death:

Many breathed their last in the open street, whilst other many, for all they died in their houses, made it known to the neighbours that they were dead rather by the stench of their rotting bodies than otherwise; and of these and others who died all about the whole city was full. [...] The consecrated ground sufficing not to the burial of the vast multitude of corpses aforesaid, which daily and well nigh hourly came carried in crowds to every church,—especially if it were sought to give each his own place, according to ancient usance,—there were made throughout the churchyards, after every other part was full, vast trenches, wherein those who came after were laid by the hundred and being heaped up therein by layers, as goods are stowed aboard ship, were covered with a little earth, till such time as they reached the top of the trench.⁷³

In Christian belief, when the dead were resurrected at the Last Judgement, the physical body and the soul were reunited. Because of the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection and rejoining body and soul, the Church favoured burials of the intact body instead of cremation, and the total destruction of the body was a drastic action. The burning of the body of heretics, sodomites and witches was a powerful way of preventing them from resurrecting – the worldly parallel was the burning or razing of a heretic’s house to the ground.⁷⁴ In times of crisis, even the corpses were not safe. Reports of hungry wolves digging up recently buried cadavers in graveyards and devouring them circulated in the Middle Ages.⁷⁵ Theologians considered the question of whether beasts that had devoured people would also be resurrected at the Last Judgement in order to vomit their prey so that these could be resurrected.⁷⁶

Certain other religions, like Tibetan Buddhism, practice sky burials or vulture-disposal, a means of recycling corpses in which the dead bodies are dissected, defleshed and crushed before leaving these human remains to be devoured by

71 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley (1968), 132.

72 *Journal d’un bourgeois de Paris*, ed. Joutard (1963), 39.

73 Boccaccio 1925 (1348–1353), trans. Payne, 15.

74 Le Roy Ladurie 1987, 37.

75 E.g., *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley (1968), 162.

76 Binski 1996, 202–203.

vultures.⁷⁷ Such practices would have been considered dishonouring the dead in the Western tradition. It is known that the Catholic Church was against cremation, largely successfully as archaeological evidence indicates. At least it is customary to assume that abandoning cremation in Nordic burial places as well as the introduction of items with Christian symbols in the graves, is a sign of Christianisation.⁷⁸

However, there were other funerary customs viewed by the Church as irreverent and cruel abuses that it attempted to ban in the Later Middle Ages. Especially among dignitaries dying far from home, it was customary to disembowel the cadaver, dismember and cook it so that the bones were dis severed from the flesh. The bones could then be easily transported and interred. This practice was known as “embalming *more teutonico*,” an originally German custom that became widespread by the thirteenth century. Indeed, the bodies of certain saints such as Saint Louis XI of France (1214–1270) and Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) were treated this way.⁷⁹ It came, however, to be vehemently opposed by the papacy. In his bull *Detestandae feritatis*, Pope Boniface VIII (r. 1294–1303) forbade this practice regardless of the status or condition of the deceased on pain of excommunication *ipso facto* in 1299. The strongest possible expressions were used to condemn the custom of chopping up and boiling the body in water: it was called a “savage abuse” (*feritatis abusum*), and the custom is called “cruel” and “horrendous for the faithful” (*saevitia [...] mentesque fidelium horror commoveat*). This abomination was considered impious both in the eyes of the Divine Majesty as in those of humans, and the body thus treated would be denied Christian burial.⁸⁰

Even though the rubric only applied to the cutting up and boiling of bodies, it also encompassed the “dispersed burials,” cutting up, eviscerating and division of corpses and the burial of various body parts (such as the heart, entrails and body) at different locations. Thus, dispersed burials were also banned by the papacy. However, papal dispensations are known to have been granted to persons of influence so that instead of abolishing the custom, it became an even more desirable status indicator of the highest echelons of medieval society.⁸¹ Thus, from the early fifteenth century, it is reported that after an English nobleman, Sir Robert Harling, had died while fighting in France, his cadaver was dissected and

boiled in a cauldron at the St. Nicholas cemetery until the flesh came off the bones. These were then carefully cleaned and packed in a chest to be taken to England. The flesh, the entrails and water were buried in a big grave at the St. Nicholas cemetery.⁸²

77 Wylie 1964–1965, 232–235.

78 See, for example, Taavitsainen 1989, 13–28; Mägi 2002, 153–154.

79 Brown 1981, 226–246; Binski 1996, 63–64; Bynum 1995, 203–208.

80 Extravagantes communes, 3.6.1. in *Corpus Iuris Canonici* 2, ed. Friedberg (1881); Brown 1981, 221–223; Binski 1996, 63–64.

81 Brown 1981, 228–246, 250–265.

82 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley (1968), 297.

The defleshed skeleton of the knight was then easily transported to his domicile in East Harling in Norfolk where it was entombed in the local Church.⁸³

It has been argued that the dispersed burials were a “final exertion of the royal [or noble] virtue of largesse” as the cut-out bodily parts were donations and indications of patronage.⁸⁴ Indeed, the same Parisian chronicler described another dispersed burial, that of Margaret of Burgundy, Duchess of Guyenne (1393–1442), with less gruesome details. While the Duchess’s body was interred in a Parisian church dedicated to Our Lady, her heart was to be taken to Notre-Dame of Liesse.⁸⁵

Both “embalming *more teutonico*” and dispersed burials represent other, parallel cultural expressions linked to death. Considering that important royal dynasties persisted in disembowelling their dead members, this ban seems to have largely disregarded among the elite, even without special authorisation or fear of excommunication. Moreover, another important motive for chopping up bodies was naturally related to a central tenet of Christian doctrine, namely, the cult of saints. The trade in relics, severed body parts of saints, had been initiated in late Antiquity and continued throughout the Middle Ages and caused the Church fathers to debate the possibility of resurrection in these cases. For example, Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430) considered resurrections as “the reassemblage” of all the bits and pieces of the body. Yet, judging by Roman legislation and Christian sermons banning the chopping up of and commerce in body parts, the trade in relics started to grow in the latter half of the fourth century.⁸⁶ It continued to flourish in the Middle Ages, and the boiling of dead potential saints was necessary to have “the bones [...] more quickly available for distribution.”⁸⁷

It is also important to keep in mind that “Christian” burial practices were not necessarily static in the course of the period in question nor were followed across the whole Church. For example, evidence from burial sites in Anglo-Saxon England suggests that pregnant women who died before or during childbirth were buried with the foetus still in the womb. These “*in utero* double burials” suggest that the practice differs from the norms found in thirteenth and early fourteenth-century conciliar statutes according to which unborn and thus unbaptised foetuses were to be cut out from their mother’s uterus before burial.⁸⁸ Twelfth-century Norwegian ecclesiastical norms however forbade this practice even though the foetus was unbaptised and heathen.⁸⁹ Related to this was the question of whether a pregnant woman could be buried in consecrated ground or not in her unclean state. The

83 Ibid., 297 fn. 1.

84 Binski 1996, 64.

85 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley (1968), 347.

86 Bynum 1995, 104–106.

87 Bynum 1995, 201–203.

88 Sayer & Dickinson 2013, 289–290.

89 Sellevold 2008, 63–64; Carlsson 1972, 136.

matter had been debated in the earlier Middle Ages, but had been resolved in the high Middle Ages by authorising that pregnant women should be buried in the churchyard like any other Christian. Nevertheless, contrary opinions were expressed even later in the Middle Ages.⁹⁰

There were also other parallel cultures and popular beliefs regarding the bodies of executed criminals. In seventeenth-century Sweden, people believed that the flying smoke from the pyre of criminals burnt for committing the heinous crime of bestiality caused crop failure, which explains why the people of the locality preferred to have the penalty of burning commuted to a heavy, collectively raised fine. However, this was dismissed as popular Catholic superstition by the King, who wished to enforce the law according to its letter and the word of God as an example for all.⁹¹

Thus, one can observe that side by side with the standard religious practices, other cultures existed partly because of regional customs. For example, in his analysis of Sienese wills, Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. has observed that testators included more instructions on how their bodies were to be dressed in the post-plague era after 1363.⁹² Here, obviously, a comparative study would be interesting as such clauses on how to dress the body seem not to have been customary, e.g., in medieval Scandinavian wills.

Parallel cultures also existed for status-related reasons, although some may have been condemned by the official Church. The Church usually advocated a speedy burial. For example, medieval Norwegian legislation insisted on timely burial within five days unless extraordinary circumstances prevented this, in which case the corpse was to be moved into an outbuilding and hoisted up for safety until interment could take place.⁹³ However, as aristocratic and royal burials in particular took long to prepare for in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, embalming was often a necessity to prevent putrefaction before burial. As embalming required skill and expensive materials, it also became an elite status symbol, just like the dispersed burials discussed above.⁹⁴

While funeral customs usually marked splendour and wealth, other status-related funeral customs underlined humility. Some monastic rules prescribed penitential elements for the post-mortem preparation of the corpses of monks, to be laid on sackcloth with ashes shaped like a cross. After washing, the corpse was dressed in a hair shirt and habit.⁹⁵

90 Nilsson 1989, 91, 244, 249–252, 289; Daniell 1997, 103; Carlsson 1972, 136–140.

91 Almquist 1926, 21–22.

92 Cohn 1988, 61. See also Daniell 1997, 31–32.

93 Nilsson 1989, 230–231. See also Lansing 2008, 50.

94 E.g., Weiss-Krejci 2008; Gittings 1984, 104–105, 166–171, 216.

95 Daniell 1997, 30–31.

Yet, in addition to this, one must allow for individual preferences.⁹⁶ Some high-status testators wished to underline their humility or penitential rigour. For example, a Sienese nobleman ordered that he be buried “without funerary pomp” (*senza pompa funebre*) in the simple robes of a Flagellant brother.⁹⁷ Henry the Young King (1155–1183) was anxious to be reconciled to his father, Henry II of England (r. 1154–1189) on his deathbed for his rebellion. After falling seriously ill, he demonstrated his penitence by lying naked on the floor in front of a crucifix. After his death, Prince Henry was placed on ashes and sackcloth, with a noose around his neck and with stones under his head and feet to demonstrate his dying a penitent.⁹⁸ The French nobleman and soldier Philippe de Mézières (ca. 1327–1405) wished to have iron chains around his neck at death. Instead of being carried on a bier, he wanted to be stripped naked and hauled by the feet to the church. His body was to be roped to a plank and cast into a grave “like carrion.”⁹⁹

The Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I took this even further. He instructed that his dead corpse receive an unusual and morbid penitential treatment and after this, be displayed to demonstrate that death was the lot of all men – even glorious rulers. Maximilian’s hair was to be cut off, his teeth pulled out, his body whipped and covered with ash and lime. The body was to be buried together with burning coals. Indeed, this seems to have been what happened. The practically toothless skeleton had been buried under lime together with twig whips.¹⁰⁰

These were individual funerary wishes of an unusual kind. However, in the case of criminals, burial rites were usually not a question of individual choice. The cruel shaming and public deaths at the hands of an executioner were set as “cautionary deaths” to large audiences in order to provide just retribution and deter others from similar criminal paths.¹⁰¹ The treatment of the bodies of criminals after death followed suit. In Paris, the body parts of the “false traitor Colinet de Puiseux,” beheaded on 12 November 1411, had been exhibited as deterrents: the head stuck upon a spear, the torso on the gallows and the four limbs over the main gates of Paris. When these body parts were taken down for burial nearly two years later, the anonymous Parisian journal-writer considered execution and dismemberment too lenient a punishment. He thought that instead of being buried, Colinet’s “body should have been burned or given to the dogs, not put into hallowed ground,” even if that would not have been a Christian thing to do.¹⁰²

96 See also Gittings 1984, 36–37, 39.

97 Cohn 1988, 179–180.

98 Daniell 1997, 160.

99 Binski 1996, 133.

100 Weiss-Krejci 2008, 186.

101 Boyden 1999, 242–243.

102 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley 1968, 59–60, 81.

Precisely because of this, revenge-killing could include the mutilation and desecration of the cadavers. Preventing the murdered bodies being prepared for death by relatives or, worse, having them defiled by animals was also a way to dehumanise them and cause them further dishonour. The treatment of the massacred corpses of the so-called “Cruel Carnival” of Udine in Friuli in 1511 was heavy with symbolism. The pursuit and butchering of noble political opponents and members of their households was linked with hog slaughter and hunting. Some corpses were cut up “like beef,” while others were thrown into wells and latrines. Many mutilated cadavers, some rendered quite unidentifiable, were left in the streets for days so that the pigs and dogs would eat them while relatives were prevented from retrieving them.¹⁰³ Similarly, the bodies of several notables, including those of Count Bernard VII of Armagnac (1360–1418), massacred in Paris during civil strife, had been buried “in a big rubbish dump.” Only in 1436 were the bones honourably reburied in a nearby church, while the Count’s remains had their resting-place in the more privileged location of its choir.¹⁰⁴

Disrespectful or indifferent treatment of their corpses was something those who had committed particularly abhorrent crimes could expect. Yet, in displaying the grisly cadavers of executed criminals, gender played a bigger role than the status of the dead. Christine Ekholst has discussed the gendered punishments passed upon those sentenced to death. She has pointed out that visible shaming was especially poignant when it came to the death sentences of men: “The male body in life, as in death, was public.” Male punishments aimed especially at exposing the dead body of the criminal – as a warning sign, while female criminals were more often destroyed by fire or covered by earth, because their dead bodies were considered impure and were also dreaded.¹⁰⁵

Demonstrative and differentiating treatment of criminals in death followed in burial. For example, the Anglo-Saxon laws demonstrated a concern for the final resting place of wrong-doers of various kinds. In addition, special cemeteries for executed criminals have been discovered in Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁰⁶ As Anne Irene Riisøy points out in her article in this current volume, the death and burial of an outlaw was a special process. The dead body of the criminal was considered a danger to the community, and part of the punishment was denying an outlaw Christian burial.

This again reflects parallel cultures. In this sense, the body of an outlaw can be compared to that of those killed by lightning, suicides or unbaptised children, whose souls could neither enter the world of the deceased nor become incorporated into the society of the dead. Wishing to be “reincorporated into the world of the living”

103 Muir 1998, 94–97, 113–119, 133–134, 138–139

104 *A Parisian Journal 1405–1449*, trans. and ed. Shirley (1968), 309.

105 Ekholst 2009, 274–276, 292–293.

106 E.g., Thompson 2004, 172–180; Buckberry 2008, 148–168

but being denied this, these homeless and wandering souls became malevolent. “These [were] the most dangerous dead.”¹⁰⁷ Some Icelandic sagas also discuss ghosts and restless dead harming the living, although this could be prevented by certain burial rituals through which hauntings could be made to cease.¹⁰⁸ For example, medieval popular belief could consider paying for masses for the deceased a necessity, because otherwise the spirits of the dead, as their ghostly doubles, would haunt the living, especially around cemeteries.¹⁰⁹ Some of the aggressive ghosts and revenants who had been criminals and excommunicates in life could be put to rest by absolution or had to be prevented from returning by destroying their corpses by burning or driving spikes through their bodies.¹¹⁰

Thus, in burying outlaws, medieval Norwegians paid special attention to choosing the site of burial, so that the community would not be tainted. The outlaws belonged neither to the earth, nor to the water and were to be placed outside the society even in death. However, no principle was without exceptions, and Riisøy discusses the debates on the burials of outlaws, also revealing the change and fluctuations in burial principles. In cases of burials of outlaws, suicides and suspected witches, pagan practices and popular belief obviously collided with the more sober views of the Catholic Church. Canon law contented itself with forbidding excommunicates from being buried in the Church’s cemeteries and, if already buried, their bones had to be exhumed (*exhumari debent*) provided they could be identified among the other corpses. In fact, the papal decretal on the subject was addressed to the archbishop of Nidaros (present-day Trondheim) indicating, as Riisøy has remarked, that the burial of outlaws and excommunicates was a topical question in Norway at the time.¹¹¹ However, the separation of excommunicates from ordinary burial grounds went on long into the early modern era, as even English examples show.¹¹²

Another sign of parallel cultures shows how the official church norms of dealing with those killed in tournaments was followed in practice. The stance of the Church was that tournaments were forbidden. If anyone died in such combat, he was to be denied ecclesiastical burial (*sepultura ecclesiastica*) if he had entered it with a wish to fight (*si accessit animo pugnandi*).¹¹³ This ban was almost universally disregarded in medieval Europe.¹¹⁴ This example reminds us of how crucial it is not to assume that normative sources automatically reflected everyday practices.

107 Van Gennep 1960 (1909), 160–161. See also Caciola 1996.

108 E.g., Kanerva (forthcoming). See also, McConchie 1982, 482–483.

109 Binski 1996, 139.

110 Caciola 1996, 21, 23, 27–29.

111 X 3.28.12 in *Corpus iuris canonici* 2, ed. Friedberg (1881): Title: “*Si ossa excommunicatorum sunt sepulta in ecclesiastico coemeterio, et discerni possunt, debent exhumari et proiici; alias secus.*”

112 Gittings 1984, 76–77.

113 X 5.13.1–2 in *Corpus iuris canonici* 2, ed. Friedberg (1881).

114 Daniell 1997, 104–105.

As tournaments, dispersed burials and embalming demonstrate, noble traditions and an aristocratic way of life created and preserved parallel cultures of death and dying regardless of the notions of the official Church. Some such elite traditions even survived changes of religion. In Reformed countries, the dissolution of the monasteries meant that many noble families lost access to the monastic abbey churches or priories where the tombs and funerary monuments of their ancestors had been erected. During an early phase of the English Reformation, tombs – even royal ones – were officially destroyed even if some nobles were successful in rescuing their family graves. In Scotland, where the Reformed church forbade burials within church buildings, some families continued to use their traditional monastic burial sites, which had lost their former role, for many decades.¹¹⁵

The dissolution of monasteries was only one of the changes caused by the Reformation in death-related practices. Many Catholic traditions were denounced as unbiblical Papist superstitions.¹¹⁶ After the Reformation, the rejection of purgatory naturally also eradicated the necessity of intercession from the living to the agonised soul in purgatory. Consequently, the prayers of the living on behalf of the deceased were curtailed. Ralph Houlbrooke has observed that there were fewer services and a temporal concentration of the obsequies. The process of interment, including the funeral service delivered by the priest, was transformed from a means of assisting the deceased in purgatory to a means to teach and comfort the living.¹¹⁷ A very material change in the ceremonies brought about by the Reformation was the disappearance of extreme unction as a sacrament and part of the deathbed rituals. As a consequence, the presence of clerics at the deathbed was not as necessary in Protestant regions as before, which reduced their influence on the will-making and led to a “secularisation of the will.”¹¹⁸

In early sixteenth-century England, two death-related *causes célèbres* had provoked anticlerical feelings and escalated into disputes about the powers of ecclesiastical officials and the immunities of the Church. In 1511, Richard Hunne (d. 1514), a London merchant tailor, had refused to pay the mortuary fee after the death of his small baby son. Cited eventually to an ecclesiastical court, he countered by challenging the powers of the ecclesiastical court in a secular court. Hunne was found hanged in his cell in 1514 – apparently a rigged suicide – after being arrested for heresy. The Church had Hunne convicted in a post-mortem trial, and his corpse was burned, but his death was pronounced to be murder and the family recovered his forfeited property.¹¹⁹

115 Daniell 1997, 200–201; Spicer 1999.

116 E.g., Gittings 1984, 39–49.

117 Houlbrooke 1989b, 29–32; Helt 1999, 194.

118 Houlbrooke 1989b, 29–32.

119 Haigh 1993, 77–83.

Another famous case was triggered by a will made by William Tracy in 1530, in which he stated his belief in his salvation by God's grace and the merits of Jesus instead of relying on prayers, masses and intercessions. Accordingly, no property was willed to ecclesiastical institutions. Copies of the will circulated, and it was pronounced heretical in 1532. Consequently, Tracy's corpse was exhumed, because the body of a heretic could not remain in consecrated ground. However, in ordering that it be burned, the ecclesiastical official overstepped the jurisdiction of the Church and was punished.¹²⁰ Thus, bodies living and dead formed religious politics in the pre-Reformation years.

In sixteenth-century France, funerals became the battleground between the Catholic and Reformed faiths. The bodies of Huguenots, as French Calvinists were called, were defiled, exhumed or refused proper burial because of their heresy and refusal to adhere to the true Catholic faith. Thus, the cadavers of Huguenots – like those of outlaws, suicides and excommunicates – were separated from the rest of the community and excluded from the hallowed communal cemeteries. As a result of these bans on burials in cemeteries, some Protestants were claimed to have embalmed the corpses of their deceased and kept them at home. This was perceived to be “against humanity,” and in 1563, after some uneasy years, Huguenots were allowed to establish unobtrusive burial grounds outside the towns. However, their funerals were restricted: the number of attendants could be thirty at the most and the interment could only take in the darkness of the hours between dusk and dawn.¹²¹

In post-Reformation England, excommunicates were sometimes buried nocturnally in the churchyard either clandestinely or by permission if, in the latter case, the excommunicates were Catholics. At the same time, the 1610s saw the rise of an aristocratic fashion for night-time funerals with torch processions, nocturnal services and interments. For some, such nocturnal funerals represented a more individual, personal and less formal burial.¹²² Thus, the exceptional time of the funerary ritual that was meant to brand some deceased as excluded deviants became the vogue among the elite. Nocturnal funerals came to send different signals, depending on social class.

Even among Protestants, the rise of religious sects within the Protestant church may have influenced funeral customs as Houlbrooke has argued for the English Puritans who advocated simplicity. “Many puritans were hostile to lavish expenditure, especially on the outward trappings of mourning, because it was wasteful and often seemed hypocritical.” This may have been a reaction to the exorbitant interment expenses of the English aristocracy, “marking the zenith of expenditure on funerals”

120 Haigh 1993, 70–72.

121 Roberts 1999, 131–148.

122 Gittings 1984, 76–77, 188–192.

during some decades around 1500.¹²³ For example, various Protestant groups – as well as Catholics – had somewhat differing funerary customs in post-Reformation England.¹²⁴

Thus it may still be appropriate to talk about cultures of death and dying in the plural rather than one uniform culture even for Reformed regions. Similarly, many popular beliefs regarding the souls of the dead lived on until the modern era.

All in all, the articles in this volume show that local and interregional cultures of death and dying were intertwined, in constant interaction, and experienced individually even in a time known for its collective mindset. Beliefs about bodies and spirits were labelled pagan and superstitious first by the Catholic and later, by the Reformed Churches as well. Side by side with Catholic beliefs and practices, heretical customs were covertly observed. After the Reformation, these could become more visible and even clash with the dominant culture. Changes in funeral fashions could also develop into parallel customs.

While the Reformation led to the abolition of many strong death-related traditions such as masses for the dead, others were simply remodelled and reinterpreted in accordance with the new tenets. In other instances, the social functions of the customs were considered so important as to carry them over religious turmoil and change. The accepted expressions of emotion may have been culturally determined, but the feelings of fear, loss and grief in face of the inescapable death were largely universal in medieval and early modern Europe.

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123 Gittings 1984, 25–26, 48–53; Houlbrooke 1989b, 34, 37.

124 Gittings 1984, 39–59.

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The Remembrance of the Deceased in the Traditional Polish Culture of the Middle Ages

Beata Wojciechowska

Jan Kochanowski University

In the Middle Ages, Polish Christian holidays remained consistent, except for minor temporary deviations. They included the basic structure of pre-Christian rituals. Yet, traces of the old Slavic ritual calendar can be clearly identified in the Polish and Czech sources from the fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries. Those were rituals and practices of the ancient, broad context of beliefs which confirmed that certain traditional attitudes and behaviour were still very much alive. The Slavic calendar of annual rites was consistent with the crucial moments of the solar cycle. The whole year was imbued with ritual contacts with the dead, waiting for their arrival, presence, and supporting them in various established ways.

Traditional beliefs and practices intertwined with the dominant Christian behaviour and attitudes associated with death and funerals, as well as the methods recommended by the Church to support the soul of the deceased. A Christian funeral, crucial for the salvation of the dead, consisted of ritual celebrations, gestures and a series of prayers recited for the deceased.

The circle of beliefs and ideas about the other world was an area where religious syncretism was very clear even many centuries after the initial Christianization. The remaining fragments of the ancient Slavic conceptions of the afterlife, plucked from the once coherent systems, still coexisted with the assimilated threads of Christian teaching in the waning centuries of the Middle Ages. They were expressed in the efforts to secure well-being, supernatural care and the integration with dead ancestors.

Introduction

In the late Middle Ages, the increasing concern for salvation as the full reward for fulfilling the precepts of faith and the Church was a sign of uncertainty about the posthumous fate of the human being. Exertions such as prayers and the final parts of religious songs contained an element of hope for the successful completion of the earthly existence. All eschatological issues had a widespread foundation. The doctrine of the Church, a component of which is the doctrine of reward and

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punishment for sin and the posthumous fate of the human soul, was common to all countries of the Western *christianitas*. They also shared the basic teachings and the essential religious content which were transmitted to the faithful during sermons and confession, and placed on the walls of churches in the form of iconography.

In recent decades, the French, Anglo-Saxon and American studies which culminated in the extensive, synthetic works by Philippe Ariès and Michel Vovelle, identified a broad program of study of the evolution of attitudes towards death in the long term.¹ They also influenced the analytical trend in research which relates to the ideas, rituals, practices, devotional behaviours, and collective feelings associated with a larger discourse of death.²

The Christian doctrine of reward and punishment after death was confronted with the local traditional beliefs. Initially, they clearly emerged from Slavic paganism, and later, after being forgotten, were manifested in practices and attitudes which theologians refer to as superstitious. Studying the phenomena of medieval culture in the field of collective mentality and imagination raises questions about the possibility of moving to the level of the common and the uneducated. Those "*illiterati et idiotae*" did not leave any direct records of their thoughts, feelings and ideas. A look at the pre-Christian layer of the Slavic notion of the world of the dead is only possible due to the writings left by theologians and preachers who meticulously recorded all traditional folk beliefs and practices in order to stigmatize them as errors and excesses in faith and Christian worship. In its teachings about punishment after death, the Church aimed primarily at effectiveness, and hence agreed to various concessions to the traditional image which was inherent in the minds and imagination of the lay faithful.

There are a number of legitimate and compelling questions about the meaning of the remembrance of the deceased in most Christian holidays, and how far the compromise reached between the practitioners of pre-Christian origin and the Christian eschatological content and ideas. The answers are contained in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century synodal statutes, texts of sermons and the reflections of theologians, scholars and chroniclers who studied the issue of attitudes and the behaviour of the faithful which grew out of their native traditions. These sources confirm the observance of feasts of the dead in various seasons of the year and practices related to faith in the life of the deceased, which were not accepted by the clergy. The confrontation of the Church with the content hidden behind the annual rites leads to rich and complex issues. One of the battlefields of this clash was where the Christian eschatology met folk beliefs which contained the echoes of archaic notions of the fate of the dead.

The Christian worldview was influenced by traditional ideas such as folk beliefs, attitudes and practices of the local population, especially in rural areas.³ In the Middle Ages, Polish Christian holidays remained consistent with the basic structure

1 Ariès 1981; Vovelle 1983.

2 Paxton 1990; Finucane 1981, 40–60; Caciola 1996; Braet & Verbeke (eds.) 1983; Lecouteux 1990.

3 Brown 1979, 1–115.

of pre-Christian rituals, except for minor temporary deviations.⁴ Yet, traces of the old Slavic ritual calendar can be clearly identified in the Polish and Czech sources from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These are rituals and practices of the old and wider belief context which confirm the liveliness of certain traditional attitudes and behaviours. The Slavic calendar of annual rites was consistent with the crucial moments of the solar cycle. The whole year was imbued with ritual contacts with the dead, waiting for their arrival, presence, and supporting them in various established ways.

In the traditional culture, the world of the living remained in a stable and close connection with the world of the dead.⁵ Stanisław of Skarbimierz (ca. 1360–1431), a fifteenth-century theologian, preacher and rector of the University of Crakow, explained in one of his sermons that it is impossible for the dying and the deceased to inform the living about their posthumous fate, either because they are condemned, remain in chains and cannot return, or they have become saints, fix their eyes on God and will not say anything until he sends them, or are doing their time in purgatory and cannot reveal anything to people without God's command.⁶ The preacher pointed to the beliefs regarding the possibility of maintaining contact with the dead and the desire to learn about the posthumous fate of loved ones. The relationship was to be established at the initiative of the dead, whose fate remained at the sole disposal of God. Stanisław addressed the community of the faithful with reasoning based on the Christian doctrine which proved the groundlessness of such an attitude and acknowledged such behaviour as sinful. Jacob of Paradyz (about 1383–1464), an eminent scholar and theologian, reproached the faithful for asking old women for advice and about the whereabouts of their dead mothers.⁷

Elements of the remembrance of the dead appeared in most Christian holidays and related folk customs. The souls of the dead which were properly taken care of after death left the mundane world with the prospect of numerous subsequent visits. Establishing contact with the dead in their own world, outside the human settlements, at crossroads, on graves or in other places was to make souls share their knowledge of the future with the living. In their relation with the community of the living, the deceased possessed magical qualities. As beings which belonged to another world they were believed to possess the knowledge of its secrets and the ability to reveal signs of a divinatory nature concerning the future of the living. People were awaiting the souls of their loved ones on particular occasions called

4 Geremek 1985, 432–482.

5 On the ties between the living and the dead in the early Middle Ages, see Geary 1995, 77–92.

6 Chmielowska (ed.) 1979, *Stanisław ze Skarbimierza Sermones sapientiales*, 2, 86–87.

7 Porębski (ed.) 1978, *Jakub z Paradyża Wybór tekstów*, 305: "*Mortua est alteri mater sua, inquit a vetula, an fit in poenis sive in gaudio.*" John of Freiburg considered the desire to learn about the posthumous fate of loved ones as the fulfillment of the natural human desire for knowledge; see Ioannes de Friburgo (1518), *Summa confessorum*, fol. 32 verso b: "*Nulla autem inordinatio in hac inquisitione videtur, si aliquis requirat a moriente cognoscere statum eius post mortem subiciendo tamen hoc divino iudicio. Unde nulla ratio videtur, quare debet dici hoc esse peccatum, nisi forte ex dubitatione fidei de futuro statu quasi tentando inquirent.*"

zaduszki (All Souls'). The arrival of these souls, however, took place beyond the reach of the senses of the living.

As for the research questions, it is necessary to consider the practices which commemorated the dead, as well as the forms of support for the souls of those who had passed away, and the Christian ways of supporting them. These problems seem to be particularly important because the Slavic world of the dead was obscured by the Christian doctrine of reward and punishment after death. Nevertheless, the reception of the West-Slavic eschatological system did not erase the late medieval fear of the dead and the need to support them by means different from those which are taught by the Church. All these elements influenced the development of a specific syncretism of beliefs which was reflected in the traditional Polish culture of the Middle Ages. It was represented in the behaviour and attitudes of the broad masses of society where the Slavic pre-Christian beliefs merged with the Christian content. Among the research sources for this issue are statutes of diocesan synods, fragments of sermons, treatises by theologians and preachers, as well as records in the annals.

In the Circle of the Eschatological Folklore

Among the medieval annual ceremonials, the winter cycle of rituals seemed particularly important. It combined the winter solstice, the transition from the old to the new year and the birth of Jesus. The symbolism of that "boundary" time was complex. In the traditional Polish culture, Christmas was called *Gody*. Not only did the name refer to the holiday itself, but also to the days from Christmas to Epiphany. The etymology of the word in Slavic languages refers to the dignity, relevance and the proper moment, emphasizing the time of holidays and celebrations.⁸ The Slavic language background, as well as historical and ethnographic data, indicate that the term originally referred to the initiation of the rites in honour of the deceased ancestors, the collective *zaduszki*, celebrated before the start of each rural season, as well as to individual *zaduszki* observed several times, a certain number of days after someone's death.⁹

For the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century inhabitants of the Polish lands, the Christmas period (*Gody*) was the culmination of the deepest and the most powerful ritual in the whole annual cycle. In a broader context, this finding can be applied to the area of Central and Eastern Europe. The exertions and activities undertaken during this period were supposed to provide success for the family, the farm and the ploughland until the next holidays. All the activities took on symptomatic significance. The culmination was the Christmas Eve supper, preceded by fasting and most probably derived from the ancient feast of abundance and prosperity.

⁸ *Słownik staropolski* 2 1956–1959, 446–447; Brückner 1993, 147–148.

⁹ Wojtyła-Świerżowska 1994, 17–18.

Christmas Eve was a particularly crucial time. It was the moment of separation from the old time, from everything that was unpleasant and imperfect, and the time of entering into a new and better time. Apparently, the usual hierarchy of social relations was suspended. Masters with their servants, the rich with the poor – at the Christmas Eve table everybody was equal and sat alongside each other, which obviously was not a common daily practice. This temporary equality was also manifested in giving gifts to the poor and allowing the servants to behave more freely.¹⁰

In addition to the suspension of social distinctions, the ontological order was also becoming unbalanced by blurring the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead. The mundane world and the afterlife merged and the souls of the ancestors came to reside among the living. The most intensive “visits” from the other side took place in the evening and on Christmas Eve. This was pointed out in the *Largum sero seu largissimus vesper* treatise by a Benedictine monk from Moravia, John of Holešova (1366–1436).¹¹

This little book written in 1400 and dedicated to Christmas Eve, was made to the order of the parish priest Przybysław of Łysa upon Elbe. Having doubts about the orthodoxy of many traditional Christmas rituals, Przybysław asked his friend to explain which of them could be observed and which ones were to be opposed. Not only is John’s treatise noteworthy because of the approach to folk religiosity, but also because of the popular Christmas Eve customs noted by and well-known to the author. John of Holešova complained that on that day divinations (*sortilegia*) grow more than on any other day of the year. He listed making wishes, gift-giving, eating bread and crumpets from quality white flour, spreading straw on the floors of residential chambers and churches, the game of dice, piling money on the table to multiply one’s wealth, telling fortunes from cut-open fruit, refusing to lend heat from the hearth and loud singing of carols. John of Holešova also mentioned that some Christians used to leave bread for pagan idols so that they could come at night and feed on the leftovers.¹² The idea of idols eating food was absurd for him. Assigning material needs to those demons was considered by him a vulgar error. He compared this custom to the tradition of bringing food to the graves of the deceased for their souls to dine.¹³ John of Holešova judged the aforementioned

10 Wojciechowska 2000, 46–47.

11 Fasseau (ed.) 1761, *Largissimus vesper seu colledae historia*; Brückner 1916, 308–351; *ibidem* the edition of the treatise. Two manuscripts of the treatise remain in the possession of the Jagiellonian Library, sign. 1700 and 1707. For a shortened Czech translation, see Havránek & Hrabák 1957 (eds.) *Výbor z české literatury od počátků po dobu Husovu*, 743–749; Bylina 1998, 69–73.

12 Brückner (ed.) 1916, *Przyczynki do dziejów języka*, 332–334, 336–339.

13 The motif of setting a table on Christmas Eve resembles the rite observed on the Roman New Year which was described by Caesarius of Arles (ca. 470–542). A table was set for the goddesses of destiny, who usually appeared on special moments such as the turn of the old and the new year. This legend, in the sense of literary tradition, reached Central Europe as an echo of the beliefs of the Roman province through Caesarius of Arles and with the help of William of Auvergne (b. after 1180–1249), a thirteenth-century bishop of Paris, as shown by D. Harmening. See Harmening 1979, 121 and further.

habits according to their conformity with the Christian tradition as well as Christian attitudes and intentions.

Christmas All-Souls rites are found in the folklore of the whole of European culture and reveal a huge wealth of observances and customs. It was believed that during the period of the solstice the mundane world would open to the visitors from the underworld. People shared their food with the shadows of the dead (leaving or spilling food and drinks), heat and light (lighting candles and bonfires), and took precautions so as not to interfere with, and especially not to harm the deceased.¹⁴ Christmas Eve was one of the most important continuations of the ancient All Souls, repeated several times during the year. The souls of the ancestors used to become (as in some other periods) guardians of the family hearth and warrantors of a good harvest. Obviously, the belief in the earthly stay of the souls of the dead, so contradictory to the Christian religion, must have led to repugnance and opposition from preachers and theologians.

After the Christmas period, winter would deprive the deceased of activity for some time and a kind of stupor was attributed to them at that time. The winter sleep of the dead ended with the first signs of the spring recovery, as is evidenced in the mid- and late-medieval Czech and Polish syllabic calendars, the so called *cyzjojany* (Lat. *cisiojanus*). Their secular content, although subservient to the superior liturgical content and the elements of religious education, refers to some ancient beliefs and ideas. *Be the snake alive. Spring [Bud' had živ. Vesna]*, the oldest thirteenth-century Czech *cisiojanus*, reports the awakening of snakes at the beginning of the second half of February, which was identified in the folk culture of the West and East Slavs with the souls of the dead and the underworld.¹⁵

A long series of spring rites began in March, with their first culmination around the date of the spring equinox. It was a kind of spring All Souls' cycle, repeated from time to time with an uneven intensity of beliefs and celebrations associated with the dead. The beginning of the spring revival of nature was a signal for the dead to awake and for their impending visit on earth. Late-medieval Czech and Polish texts contain descriptions of rituals and practices loaded with their long-term coexistence with the Christian cult and influenced by the Christian liturgical calendar. The Slav-wide early spring rite of carrying the effigy of Death beyond the boundaries of human settlements concerned, among other things, the souls of the dead. Such efforts were possibly aimed at various demonic powers and against the deceased who died from unnatural causes, that is "the impurely deceased". In Poland, the effigy was called *Marzanna*, *Mara* or *Marena*, which in the West Slavic languages have an etymological connection with death (*mór*). It was made with a bundle of hemp or straw, dressed in human clothes and carried away beyond the

14 Bylina 1992.

15 Nováková 1967, 27–28; Bylina 1999, 25–26.

city gates with superstitious, rhythmical singing and dancing.¹⁶ The noise made during this procession was supposed to drive away evil spirits and prevent them from causing harm to people. Such rites were attended by residents of villages, towns and cities alike.

We are therefore faced with a popular ritual which was not limited to rural environments only. This ritual was a common concern of the whole community. The destruction of the effigy by dropping it into the water, swamps or mud was supposed to prevent death in the following year and dismiss the inner conviction of the inevitability of leaving this world.¹⁷ Getting rid of this symbol of winter deadness was considered a dangerous act. The hostile force which was being destroyed could reveal its destructive powers even at that very last moment of its existence. The fear of the unknown power made the participants hastily leave the theatre of the effigy's destruction. Since the escape was an attempt to achieve liberation from evil forces, those who fell during the return home were predicted to die soon. The ritual of dumping the effigy was observed on the fourth Sunday of fasting, called the lethal or white Sunday (in the liturgy "*Laetare*"). This term suggests a trace of the Indo-European custom devoted to death and the dead.¹⁸ One of the many meanings of this content-rich custom can be associated with the habit of sending signals by water, a kind of "messenger" to the other world, in order to encourage its residents to renew their interest in the affairs of the living.

The written sources indicate an intense celebration of the earthly residence of the dead during Holy Week. The East Slavs used to contact the deceased through the preparation of a feast and ritual baths. A traditional festival called *Radunica* was celebrated. In Slavic languages, its name may be etymologically derived from "ancestry" (*ród*), "parents" (*rodzice*) or "the memory of the grandfathers" (*dziady*).¹⁹ In Poland, the days preceding Easter, that is Holy Wednesday and Holy Thursday (in English also known as Spy Wednesday and Maundy Thursday), were of particular importance for the cult of the dead. In the fifteenth century on the Holy Wednesday people piled up branches and lit special bonfires (called *grumadki*) to warm the souls of the deceased ancestors.²⁰ The few written sources confirm that on the

16 This rite is confirmed in synodal statutes of Prague from 1366 and 1384, synodal statutes of the Bishop of Poznań Andrzej Łaskarzowicz from Gostawice (1362–1426) from around 1420, Jana Długosz's Chronicles, a part of a sermon by Stanisław from Skarbimierz and a fragment from Marcin Bielski's Chronicles from the sixteenth century. See Höfler (ed.) 1862, *Concilia Pragensia 1353-1413*, 63–64; Sawicki (ed.) 1952, *Concilia Poloniae* 7, 156; Długossy 1961, *Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae*, lib. 1, 166, 244; Zawadzki (ed.) 1978, *Stanisław ze Skarbimierza, Sermones super „Gloria in excelsis”*, 104; Bielski 1764, *Kronika polska niegdyś w Krakowie*, 34.

17 Höfler (ed.) 1862, *Concilia Pragensia*, 64: "[...] in eorum ignominiam asserentes quod mors eis ultra nocere non debeat tanquam ab ipsorum terminis sit consumata et totaliter exterminata".

18 Gieysztor 2006, 242.

19 Bylin 1992, 28.

20 Belcarzowa 1981 (ed.), *Głosy polskie w łacińskich kazaniach średniowiecznych* 1, 57: "Item feria quarta magna admoneantur ne crement focos grumathky ardentes secundum ritum paganorum in commerationem animarum suarum cariorum. Item qui mentiuntur, qui dicunt quo animae ad illum ignem veniant et se illic calefaciant."

following day, Holy Thursday, the souls visited homes. Stanisław of Skarbimierz mentioned the habit of leaving the dishes unwashed, in order that the souls of deceased could dine on the leftovers.²¹

Under the influence of the stories circulating among the people, an anonymous preacher of the Benedictine Monastery of St. Cross on Łysa Góra completed the reflections of the Krakow scholar adding information about the home spirit called *uboże*. Every Thursday and on Holy Thursday, *uboże* was offered a food sacrifice. The unnamed author explained that contrary to what “the silly and vain people believed”, it was usually the dog, not the spirit, to fed on the nourishment.²² *Uboże* impersonated the remembrance of the dead associated with compassion for the poor posthumous fate of the miserable soul wandering somewhere in an indeterminate, empty and barren space. The exiled soul pined for the loved ones. The homelessness of the soul determined the most important feature of the traditional vision of the afterlife and its destiny after death.²³

In another sermon, Stanisław of Skarbimierz reproved those who sacrificed to demons, asked them for something or left some food for them on plants and trees.²⁴ The author of the sermon did not clearly indicate the relationship between the domestic demons and the souls of ancestors, but showed the similarity in the concern for both categories of beings from another world.

Although the Polish late-medieval sources describe customs opposed by preachers and theologians, we do not know what changes they had undergone since the pre-Christian period. Generally, however, they present basic forms of support for the souls of the deceased: leaving food for them and lighting bonfires *secundum ritum paganorum* in order to help the arriving spirits keep warm. The general goal was a warm welcome for the souls of the deceased loved ones.

The traditional annual Slavic celebrations were concentrated in the period between Easter and Pentecost and contained many minor exertions which expressed the cult of the dead and the belief in the presence of their souls among the living. The Czech chronicler Kosmas noted a custom known to him from the twelfth century. On Tuesday or Wednesday after Pentecost, villagers celebrated over their dead “dancing with face masks attached and calling the shadows of the dead.” He also reported that the Slavs believed that the souls of the dead somehow resided at crossroads; hence they used to build shelters and wooden booths for

21 Chmielowska (ed.) 1979, *Stanisław ze Skarbimierza Sermones sapientiales*, 90: “Nonnulli sunt, qui non lavant scutellas post caenam feria quinta magna ad pascendum animas. Stulti, credentes spiritus corporalibus indigere, cum scriptum sit: Spiritus carnem et ossa non habet [Luc.24,39]. Si ergo carnem non habet corporalibus pasci non indigent. Aliqui dimittunt remanentias ex industria in scutellis, tunc post caenam quasi, ad nutriendum animas; quod est erroneum.”

22 Brückner 1895, 345.

23 Bracha 2011, 49–70.

24 Zawadzki (ed.) 1978. *Stanislaus de Scarbimiria, Sermones super “Gloria in excelsis”*, 104: “Daemonibus sacrificia offerunt vel ab eis responsa petunt [...] aut in arboribus vel plantis aliquod nutriminis ponunt.”

their souls to rest in.²⁵ In a burial custom a few centuries later, bundles of straw were thrown out at the intersections of roads and at the borders of villages for the souls of the dead to rest on.²⁶ People who died prematurely or from unnatural causes, especially suicide, were also buried in these places. They became dangerous in the magical-religious sense. Their spirits wandered in and inhabited different places away from human settlements.



Picture 1. In the Biblical story (1 Sam. 28:3–25), King Saul who had expelled all necromancers wished to communicate with the dead prophet Samuel about his war against the Philistines. For this purpose, he visited the witch of Endor who summoned the ghost of Samuel.

The relation between the souls of the dead and the cyclical seasonal changes made them participate more closely in the life of nature. The spring awakening of the dead began at a time when plants were coming back to life and arable land was being prepared for sowing. The ritual lighting of spring fires stimulated vegetation and could be one of the signals inducing the activity of the sleeping souls. In the Slavic languages, the proximity of two words is very meaningful: the verb for “light a fire” (*krzesać*) is very similar in pronunciation to “resurrect” (*wskrzeszać*).²⁷ The traditional cult of the dead weakened over the summer, probably because of intensive harvesting.

Traces of the autumn earthly stay of the souls (autumn All Souls) have been quite strongly blurred. A Polish rhyming calendar from the second half of the

25 Bretholz (ed.) 1923, *Cosmae Pragensis: Chronica*, lib. III, cap. 1. 161.

26 Fischer 1921, 330–331.

27 Tyszkiewicz 1976, 591–597.

fifteenth century placed between St. Francis “grating hemp” (4 October) and St. Hedwig (15 October) a day or a few days in which peasants were preparing a ritual feast for the dead (a wake).²⁸ This record indicates the habit of preparing a special meal for the souls of ancestors or the deceased loved ones which might have also been consumed in their honour.

Later, just before the winter, the spirits of the dead revived around 13 December, the day perceived by the people as the shortest of the year. Some echoes of the fear of that day can be found in the medieval Polish proverb “Stay at home Lucy” (*“Łucyja siedź doma”*).²⁹ The invisible souls of ancestors did not avoid visiting their descendants, adapting to their way of feeling the rhythm and the changes taking place in the environment.

The symbolic nature of rituals meant that the time of celebration took on special characteristics. It was the time of re-integration with the sacred order, a time when the earth and the underworld became reunited. The dead would leave their graves and come to visit the living. This was normal during the suspension of the common order while the change between seasons was taking place. As the time of the visit was coming to an end, the dead were seen off until the time of the next celebration. Their constant presence was unwanted.

The Christian Concern for the Fate of the Soul

Traditional beliefs and practices intertwined with the dominant Christian behaviour and attitudes associated with death and the funeral, as well as the methods recommended by the Church to support the soul of the deceased.³⁰ A Christian funeral, crucial for the salvation of the dead, consisted of ritual celebrations, gestures and a series of prayers recited for the deceased. Poor people were buried naked or wrapped in straw. Most of the dead were wrapped in a shroud. The Church also tried to ensure a proper funeral for the poor, as evidenced in synodal acts. The statute of the Wrocław diocesan synod of 1446 ordered parish priests to serve the rich and the poor equally.³¹

The posthumous fate of the soul was influenced by a proper funeral service. From the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries we do not find any traces of gifts put into the grave which were supposed to help the deceased in the afterlife. Many different rituals over the dead body and the grave which, according to pre-Christian beliefs, were inevitable for the posthumous well-being of the dead, had been forgotten or rooted out by the Church. On the first evening after death, called “an empty evening”, relatives, neighbours and friends guarded the corpse. The

²⁸ Fijałek 1927, 2445.

²⁹ Vrtel-Wierczyński (ed.) 1952, *Średniowieczna poezja polska świecka*, 99.

³⁰ Burgess 2000, 44–64; Caciola 2000, 66–86.

³¹ Sawicki (ed.) 1963, *Concilia Poloniae* 10, 454.

Polish name for this custom reflected the situation of the deceased person, not yet buried, no longer belonging to the world of the living but not fully belonging to the other world either.

The uncertainty of the posthumous fate of the human soul was expressed in the fifteenth-century Polish song "The soul has fled out of the body" ("*Dusza z ciała wyleciała*"). A soul, after leaving the body, arrives in a meadow and bursts into tears as it does not know where to go. An unnamed interlocutor takes it to paradise, to the kingdom of heaven.³² That theme of the insecurity and confusion of the soul also appeared in other beliefs, clearly Christianized, referring to the early afterlife phase of the human fate. An anonymous fifteenth-century Polish sermon reported that on the first night after death the soul stays with St. Gertrude, on the second with St. Michael and on the third night leaves for the designated place. On Saturday evening, the souls leave Purgatory and rest until Monday, until someone starts to work.³³



Picture 2. The pains of the souls in purgatory are depicted in this decorated initial by the workshop of Gerard Horenbout (1465–1541) from about 1500.

³² Michałowska 1995, 512.

³³ Bracha 2007 (ed.) *Nauczanie kaznodziejskie w Polsce późnego średniowiecza. Sermones dominicales et festuales*, 165.

Very much alive and supported by the Church, however, was the deep conviction of the obligation to bury the body and how important for salvation was a solemn funeral service.³⁴ The candles lit by the bed of a dying Christian played a very important role. They lit up the darkness in which the sins were buried and accompanied the angels in their fight against evil spirits for the soul of the dead. Later, burning candles were an important element of the funeral procession and symbolized the sky which, according to the hopes of the living, the dead were entering. This belief was confirmed by a fifteenth-century Polish preacher: "Those shall be condemned after whom candles will not be carried."³⁵ In honour of the deceased a meal was collectively consumed, in the belief that the soul of the deceased also participated in that meeting. It was reflected in the custom of throwing crumbs of food under the table for the deceased. Polish diocesan synodal statutes from the fifteenth century called on the clergy participating in funeral feasts (wakes) for restraint or totally prohibited participation in them.

Traditional beliefs prevailed in the period between the human death and moving of the soul into the unknown beyond. The burial of the body was seen as the end to the earthly human existence. People feared the possibility of the return of the dead to their homes shortly after the funeral. The belief in the possibility of their return to home not long after the funeral filled people with fear. Perhaps this fear stemmed from the archaic conviction about the consequences of failing to prepare an adequate funeral ceremony, which was combined with the concern for the well-being of the deceased in the afterlife. A preacher and theologian, Stanisław of Skarbimierz, condemned preventing the resurgence of the dead as superstitious. Among other things, he mentioned spilling ash before the threshold of the house of the dead and burying some objects of magical significance under the threshold.³⁶ He attributed these practices to women and men, the elderly and the young. The threshold of the house served as a boundary which separated the living from the dead, which was to prevent unwanted returns of the buried dead from the underworld.

There were also souls which showed no benevolence to people, however, not in a very dangerous manner but rather with a tendency to scare anyone surprised by seeing or hearing them. They came from ancient beliefs combined with the Christianized idea of the atonement for the sins unexpiated in the earthly life. Those sorrowful, repentant souls could stay in very different places: near the tomb, at the site of the sudden loss of life, under bridges, rocks, at crossroads, in caves, wells, forests, bushes, under the threshold and inside the home. The fear of the drowned was common. They were seen as evil and insidious and used to pull bathing people into whirlpools. The Church rejected the belief in the corporeal form of ghosts hostile towards people. It was critical of the idea of protection against this

34 Bylina 2009, 136–137.

35 Zaremska 1977, 139–140.

36 Chmielowska (ed.) 1979, *Stanisław ze Skarbimierza Sermones sapientiales*, 87.

or similar categories of the dead, at the same time criticizing the non-Christian ways of helping the visitors from the other world. The Christian belief in the immortality of souls combined with the long-standing belief in their circulation around the house, arrival on All Souls' Day, warming up by the fire and eating foods. The Church imposed prohibitions on human interference in matters relating to death: its prediction or indication through divinations about who was to pass away next. Some practices to guard against death were also recognized as superstitious; for example, the wearing of protective amulets.

In the Christian eschatology, the place where the immortal and incorporeal soul and those souls deprived of their earthly needs resided was connected with the places of reward and punishment after death. The funeral liturgical forms used in the initial phase of the Christianization of Poland included prayers for the salvation of the human soul and the lack of punishment by fire and other torments.³⁷ In the late Middle Ages, the concept of the soul was well-known in Polish lands. The faithful learned it from the liturgy, sermons and prayers. At the end of their lives, they devoted their souls to God and the Saints. The soul, however, was difficult to imagine. In the iconographic teaching, it was depicted as a small, vague (non-material) silhouette of a human shape, coming out of a dying man's mouth. It was also imagined as a small but distinctive figure lifted up to heaven by the angels. Preachers and writers of religious works claimed that the souls of the dead experienced joy and passion similarly to the living. In the mass imagination, the soul was somehow another body, similar to that which was buried in the ground.³⁸

All the actions taken by the living, in addition to grief, were motivated by their faith in the effectiveness of their gestures towards the dead. Church teaching promoted the belief that the living may reduce the suffering of the souls in purgatory by attending Holy Mass, saying prayers and performing good deeds. Crakow synodal statutes by bishops Nanker (Nankier, ep. 1320–1326) and Grotowic (Jan Grot, ep. 1326–1347) confirmed the observance of funeral eves. According to the synod of 1323, they were to be celebrated once a week in every parish. The dead were commemorated in breviary prayers. The office of the dead, the *officium defunctorum*, was a daily duty of the clergy. Fasting and alms also helped to relieve the souls in purgatory. The official liturgy of the Church set the prayers for the dead in the canon of the mass, the funeral service, funeral masses, and in the custom of *wypominki*, that is, reading the names of the deceased after every sermon. Reflection on death became a part of thinking about one's own fate.

37 Labudda 1983, 271–276.

38 Bylina 1992, 19.



Picture 3. This skull illustrates the office of the dead, the *officium defunctorum*, in the Gualenghi-d'Este Hours by Taddeo Crivelli (d. ca. 1479). The office begins with the words "*Placebo Domino*" (I will please the Lord).

Conclusion

The attitude of the Church towards the non-Christian manifestations of the ties between the world of the living and that of the deceased is characterized by a sort of ambiguity, sometimes difficult to recognize. There were prohibitions imposed when the content traced in popular practices was considered to be clearly discrepant from the Christian truths of faith. However, there was also tolerance for certain behaviours and rituals, especially those which were considered superstitious or pagan. In the fifteenth century, the warming of souls by the fire after they came back from the cold underworld was perceived by Polish preachers as "*ritus paganorum*", while leaving food for them was seen as "*erroneum*". The vigil by the deceased and mourning during the "empty evening" was described as "*consuetudo*". Therefore, cyclic practices were treated more severely (feeding and warming souls) than occasional ones which related to death and burial.

The circle of beliefs and ideas about the other world was an area in which religious syncretism was very clear even many centuries after the initial Christianization. The remaining fragments of the ancient Slavic conceptions of the afterlife, plucked from the once coherent systems, still coexisted with the assimilated threads of Christian teaching in the waning centuries of the Middle Ages. They were expressed in the efforts to secure well-being, supernatural care and integration with dead ancestors. The reflection on the nature of death was commemorative in character. It led human memory beyond the earthly horizon, became a kind of warning or encouragement which could not be forgotten in this life. The remembrance of the deceased was undoubtedly an element of thinking about oneself.

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Deviant Burials: Societal Exclusion of Dead Outlaws in Medieval Norway

Anne Irene Riisøy

Buskerud and Vestfold University College

In Norway, an outlaw was “placed outside the law” and, after the introduction of Christianity in the eleventh century, the worst kinds of outlaws, perpetrators described in terms revolving around the vargr and the niðingr, were denied burial in the churchyard. Such people had committed their crimes in an unmanly and stealthy way. Additionally, they may have avoided taking responsibility for their actions. Such behaviour made an otherwise redeemable act irredeemable.

This norm for proper conduct is firmly rooted in pre-Christian notions, and the Church used it as a platform to make it easier for the populace to understand that whereas most people belonged within the churchyard, others clearly did not. With some modifications during the high Middle Ages, typically when additional categories of criminals were excluded from Christian burial, this principle carried through well into the early modern period. Documents which can tell us how these rules worked out in practice are few and far between, but are enough to show that the Church tried to ensure that the worst outlaws remained out of the churchyard. The outlaws’ bodies may have been buried at the place of execution, typically close to the gallows, or at the shore or under heaps of stones far away from settlements.

Introduction

In Viking Age and medieval Norway, an outlaw was “placed outside the law”, a loss of legal protection which had several consequences.¹ An outlaw might be expelled from a legal province or from the country, forfeit property and risk being killed by anyone with impunity. The concept and applicability of outlawry changed over time.²

1 Ebbe Hertzberg, who wrote the glossary of *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387* [hereafter *NgL*], ed. by Keyser *et al.*, *NgL* V, 676, interpreted *útlagr*, *útlægr*, *útslægr* as “*fredløs, stillet udenfor loven*”, i.e., “outlaw, placed outside the law”.

2 Riisøy 2014.

The introduction of Christianity brought about alterations; for example, outlaws were denied burial in the churchyard, which will be the topic of this article. The defined and enclosed churchyard implies that someone controlled that particular space and access to it, and I will ask why exactly outlaws were denied Christian burials, who controlled this process and where deceased outlaws were buried.

This article will cover a long chronological span, and hence touch upon various “cultures” of death, which were influenced by both heathen and Christian ways of thinking. The focus will primarily be on the Middle Ages, which in Norway lasted from approximately the early eleventh century to the coming of the Reformation in 1537. To a certain extent, this study will delve into the Viking Age because the rules on exclusion of outlaws evidenced in the earliest Norwegian Christian laws have found inspiration in pre-Christian provisions on outlawry. Hence rules which placed some categories of people outside the sphere of the good Christian dead were based not only on Christian notions of life after death, but were also very much rooted in a heathen secular way of thinking about the punishment of criminals in this world. This combination of various legal and religious notions was probably facilitated by the fact that before, during, and after the Middle Ages, the populace at large saw no clear demarcation lines between the living and the dead, between flesh and soul.

The Christian culture was not a given once and for all, and the Middle Ages saw changes which also had a bearing on rules of exclusion of various categories of criminals from the churchyard, and although traditionally considered a watershed in regard to introducing new religious and legal ideas, the introduction of the Reformation did not initially touch upon the question of how to treat dead criminals. Hence, some discussion of the treatment of dead outlaws after the Reformation is also in order.

Rules on Burial: Inclusion and Exclusion

The archaeological evidence for the tenth century is fragmentary, but enough to show that the oldest Christian cemeteries and churches in Norway go back to this time. At Veøy on the coast of western Norway, the remains of a church and a cemetery dating to the mid-tenth century were found, and further south along the coast, at the royal manor at Fitjar, Christian burials may have taken place at the same time.³ At Kvinesdal in southern Norway, stratigraphic analysis and radiocarbon dating evidence a church built ca. AD 1000, while a Christian cemetery at the same site may be 100 years older.⁴ Comparable early dates exist for Faret in Skien in south-eastern Norway, where a Christian grave area, limited by a ditch, was established inside a pre-Christian cemetery in the mid-tenth century, and in

3 Veøy see Solli 1996, 89–114; Fitjar see Iversen 2008; Dunlop 1998.

4 Brendalsmo & Stylegar 2001, 5–47.

the early eleventh century a church was built.⁵ This pattern, where a Christian cemetery was a direct continuation of a pre-Christian burial ground, and where the building of a church came last, is evidenced in several places in Norway.⁶ Christianization was a protracted process, and heathen burials of the eleventh century are still documented along the coast of Agder in southern Norway.⁷

Because churches and churchyards are very visible manifestations of the new religion, I will rule out the idea that rules on Christian burial were enacted in law before Christianity finally gained universal political acceptance, which happened during the first half of the eleventh century in most of Norway. At this time, there were four large legal provinces: Gulathing (west coast), Frostathing (the area north of the Gulathing), Eidsivathing (east) and Borgarthing (south-east), each of which had its own representative assembly. The dating of the oldest Christian laws will always be open to some debate because the oldest manuscripts and fragments in which they are preserved date from around 1200.⁸ Although these laws were undoubtedly written down before then, there is contention over how much earlier. Whether the laws contain even older, orally transmitted material is also debatable. However oral traditions were much stronger in the Middle Ages than today and, because a law may consist of several chronological strata, it is possible to see that some laws, or sections of laws, are indeed older than others; this can be seen both in choice of terminology and concepts, and in the existence of obsolete regulations alongside new rules.

In the area of the Gulathing, some Christian law legislation may already have been enacted during the reign of King Haakon the Good (r. ca. 933–959), who was sent to Wessex to be fostered at the court of King Æthelstan (r. over Mercia and Wessex 924–939, r. over England 927–939).⁹ Wessex probably exercised considerable influence on the Christianization of Norway, particularly the western parts of the country.¹⁰ When Haakon came back to Norway, it is quite likely that

5 Reitan 2006.

6 Vibe Müller 1991.

7 Rolfsen 1981, 128. For a study including various parts of Norway, see Walaker Nordeide 2011.

8 See, for example, Helle 2001, 17–23, Rindal 1996, Røssstad 1997. A short description of each law manuscript is found in *NgL* IV, xiv–xv.

9 According to *Bergsöglisvisur*, a poem composed by Sigvat in the 1030s, King Haakon was King Æthelstan's fosterson (Hollander 1964, 553), and a total of five different sagas, written in Old Norse or in Latin also mention this; see Williams 2001, 113–114.

10 This influence may have been less in Eastern Norway, and Landro 2010 has shown that the Old Christian Borgarthing Law also had Continental influence.

missionaries were among his entourage.¹¹ Haakon probably transferred his experiences in regard to Christian beliefs and rituals from Wessex by initiating the building of some churches and by introducing a Christian law which included a few basic rules.¹²

Christian missionaries were present in Wessex from the early seventh century. The transition from field cemeteries to churchyard burial was slow, but the majority of burials are adjacent to ecclesiastical buildings by the mid-eighth century.¹³ In England, it was no longer the norm to inhumate criminals in community cemeteries from the eighth century onwards. Some of these ended up at so-called execution cemeteries; burial grounds used to inter those denied churchyard burial, including criminals, the unbaptised and suicides. The deceased often lay on their sides or in a prone position with their limbs akimbo, decapitated or interred with bound hands; the so-called “deviant burials”.¹⁴ Early tenth century legislation, which starts to refer to the exclusion of criminals, may thus have reinforced existing practices.¹⁵ Hence Anglo-Saxon missionaries who came to Norway in the tenth and eleventh centuries were long used to legislation and legal practice that excluded certain categories of criminals from churchyard burial.

In a comprehensive study on the legislation on burials in *Corpus Iuris Canonici* and in the medieval Nordic laws, Bertil Nilsson has found that canon law had no uniform rule regarding exclusion from Christian burial. The canonists showed frustratingly little interest in this issue and canon law is less specific than the Nordic laws in this respect.¹⁶ Canon law had two main reasons for exclusion; first, people who had never been part of the Christian community, baptism being the ultimate criterion, and secondly, people who had been separated from the Church. This latter group is of interest here. The most numerous group were excommunicates,

11 See Jørgensen 1995; Birkeli 1995; Williams 2001. William of Malmesbury (ca. 1095/1096–ca. 1143), the distinguished twelfth-century English historian, probably had information about an Anglo-Saxon bishop who served during Haakon the Good’s rule. *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiæ* contains a list of death dates for ten Glastonbury monks who became bishops, and who lived during the reign of King Edgar (r. 958–975). Fridtjov Birkeli suggested that the first five names constitute the original list, and hence number four on the list, *Sigefridus norwegensis episcopus*, may have been a bishop in Norway during Haakon’s reign. Sigefridus may have been forced back to England during the heathen reaction which followed in the wake of King Haakon’s death. According to Gareth Williams, this information is quite consistent with the *Saga of Hákon the Good*, chapter 13, that “he sent to England for a bishop and other priests”, Hollander 1964, 106.

12 Williams 2001, 116–117. For example, he may have transferred the celebration of Yule from the midwinter nights to “the same time as is the custom with the Christians”, and the king himself kept Sundays and fasted on Fridays, Hollander 1964, 106, chapter 13.

13 Cherryson 2008, 115–130, Buckberry 2008, 148–168.

14 In a study of Anglo-Saxon burial practices from 1992, Helen Geake was the first to use the expression “deviant burials”, Buckberry 2008, 148.

15 Reynolds 1997, 38. Athelstan II 26, decrees that anyone who swears a false oath shall not be buried in consecrated burial ground unless the bishop permits it, Attenborough 1922, 140–143. According to King Edmund (r. 939–946), a man “who has intercourse with a nun, unless he make amends, shall not be allowed burial in consecrated ground any more than a homicide. We have decreed the same with regard to adultery”, Robertson 1925, 7.

16 Nilsson 1989, 242, 255.

who died before they had been reconciled and hence been reintegrated into the Christian community.¹⁷ Among the excommunicates may also have been various categories of criminals. Otherwise canon law excludes from Christian burial people who had broken the Ten Commandments, including crimes against the religion, and thieves and robbers. Nilsson points out that canon law does not specifically mention outlaws.¹⁸

As a general rule, all Christian people who died should be brought to the churchyard for burial,¹⁹ but there already were explicit exceptions to this rule in the oldest Christian laws: “evildoers, traitors, murderers, truce breakers, thieves, and men who take their own lives” are listed in the Old Christian Gulathing Law, while in the Old Christian Eidsivathing Law people who broke temporally or locally imposed peace or protection (*gríðniðingar*), arsonists (*brænnui vargar*) and violent housebreakers (*hæimsoknar vargar*) are listed as well.²⁰ Suicide is condemned according to ecclesiastical law; otherwise all these specified crimes are punished with outlawry according to the oldest secular sections of the laws which have survived, those from the Gulathing and the Frostathing.²¹

Other crimes than those enumerated above also entailed outlawry according to the secular sections in the medieval Norwegian law codes, and it therefore seems that not all outlaws were equal, some not being excluded from the churchyard, so the question then is, what characterizes those who were denied Christian burial?

Outlaws Excluded from Proper Burial

First in the enumeration of these outlaws, the Old Christian Gulathing Law lists traitors (*drottens svica*). A *dróttin* was a title for a lord in a broader sense, whether he was a king, leader of a war band, or an owner of slaves and, after the introduction of Christianity, even Christ.²² To betray one’s lord was the worst crime imaginable; and the traitor was branded as a *níðingr*, implying lack of masculinity – a coward. Thomas L. Markey found that *níð* was part of an ancient pre-Christian tradition among the North Germanic peoples, best maintained in the West Norse Area.²³ Here it was clearly also associated with the most cowardly crimes, and a

17 Nilsson 1989, 255.

18 Nilsson 1989, 271–272.

19 G 23 and F II 15, *NgL* I, 13–14, 135–136; Larson 1935, 51, 232.

20 E II 40, *NgL* I, 405. The paragraphs on burial in the *Old Christian Borgarthing Law* do not mention anything about whether outlaws should be allowed Christian burial or not. The primary concern in early medieval Borgarthing seems to have been whether people were buried according to their social standing: B I 9, B II 18, B III 13, *NgL* I, 345, 359–360, 368.

21 Only a few paragraphs and a fragment are preserved from the secular sections in the Borgarthing and the Eidsivathing, so only the Christian law sections have survived from these two laws, Riisøy 2003, 155–156.

22 *NgL* V, 139–140. For an in-depth study of the *dróttin*, see Green 1965.

23 Markey 1972.

níðing-crime was committed under such circumstances and by such methods as to give the criminal the reputation of a wicked and deceitful person with an unmanly and weak personality. Primarily on the basis of runic inscriptions, Judith Jesch discusses how betrayal was considered the “deed of a *níðingr*” in the Viking Age when ideally a man showed complete loyalty within his group, a group who formed a partnership in war or in trade.²⁴ During the eleventh century when Scandinavian kingship grew more powerful, concepts of loyalty and treachery moved away from relationships within a more equal group towards a more clearly defined “above and below” perspective, the king and his subjects. This point of view is also reflected in Norwegian law; for example, according to the Old Frostathing Law, F IV 4, plotting to deprive the king of land and subjects was the worst form of a nothing crime (*níðingsverc hit mesta*).²⁵

There were also other acts committed by a *níðingr*, including several categories of murder, which ultimately led to exclusion from the churchyard. The distinction between manslaughter – which it was possible to atone for – and murder – which led to irredeemable outlawry – was an old and very important one in Norwegian law. *Morð* was a homicide committed in some underhand way and the killer concealed the deed and avoided assuming responsibility for it by declaring what he had done. The punishment for murder was more severe than for ordinary slaying, and the murderer could be killed in his turn, without legal consequences.²⁶ According to paragraph 178 in the Old Gulathing Law a so-called *níðingsvíg*, which includes violent housebreaking (*heimsokn*), burning another to death (*brenner mann inni*) and murdering a person (*myrðir mann*), entailed irredeemable outlawry, loss of personal rights and all property.²⁷ Comparable rules are laid down in the Old Frostathing Law.²⁸

24 Jesch 2001, 258–265.

25 NgL I, 158; Larson 1935, 257. In the Swedish provincial laws, *níðingsværk* only appears in the oldest version of the *Västgötalagen*, written around 1220. This law was used in West Gothia (*Västergötland*), the western province bordering on Norway. When a new king rode the so-called *eriksgata*, he had the power to grant peace and protection (*frip*) to three criminals, but not men who had committed *níðingsværk*, SSGL I, 36–38, Holmbäck & Wessén 1946, 70–74. The *eriksgata* was a ritual-judicial royal progress performed at the royal election; see Sundqvist 2002, 306–333. This concept clearly also existed in eastern Scandinavia. The now lost memorial stone from the Swedish province of Uppland U 954, in eastern Sweden, has the term *níðiksuerk* “the deed of a *níðingr*”; see discussion in Jesch 2001, 255. The so-called Pagan Law from Uppland, which is preserved in a fragment from the thirteenth century, contains a section where a man who uses an unspeakable word (*oquæpins orð*) to another: “You are not a man’s equal and not a man at heart.” [He answers:] “I am as much a man as you.” A duel should follow this verbal exchange, but if only the insulted man turned up was he allowed to shout three *níðing*-shouts” and mark the other man in the ground”; see Foote & Wilson 1980, 379–380.

26 Regarding the proper report of a slaying, see F IV 7 and G 156, NgL I, 61–62, 159–160; Larson 1935, 130–131, 260. It was also murder if a man killed his slave without reporting it according to G 182, NgL I, 66–67; Larson 1935, 138.

27 NgL I 66; Larson 1935, 137.

28 Killing of a man after peace pledges have been given (*vegr á veittar tryggðir*) or killing a man to whom temporary protection (*gríðum*) was given and if a man murders a man (*ef maðr dreppir mann á morð*) were defined as foul killing (*scemdarvíg*) in F IV 2, F IV 3 and F IV 4. Setting fire to another man’s homestead and burning it down was also labelled foul killing as well as a nothing crime (*níðingsverc*) in F IV 4, and F IV 5 stress that all free men shall enjoy security in their homes. NgL I, 158–159; Larson 1935, 257–258.

Later legislation on homicide which applied to the rest of the Middle Ages also builds upon these principles. The relevant paragraphs in the Book of Personal Rights in the Law of King Magnus IV “the Law-Mender” (r. 1263–1280), codified in 1274 and which applied to the whole country, specify that if a man killed (*uegr*) another person, the killer forfeited all his property except his real estate, (*iordum sinum*). However, if a person committed a vile murder, (*niðings uigh*), he forfeited his real estate as well.²⁹



Picture 1. This decapitation scene is from a text written by Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405–1464), future Pope Pius II. The text is a long letter to a friend depicting court life in realistic terms, sometimes resulting in political violence. In the background, a man is being lead to gallows for hanging and on the left, another is facing drowning.

29 With King Magnus's Law of 1274, legal uniformity was achieved in Norway. Vile murders are further specified in L IV 1 (especially items 3.4 and 3.5); *NgL* II, 48; Amongst other things it is a *niðings uigh* if a man murders a person, (*ef maðr myrðir mann*); *NgL* II, 50–51.

Burning someone to death was one of these vile murders and considered a very cowardly deed. Not only was it an excruciatingly painful way to die, but it was also derogatory because often the victim had no way of escape and no opportunity to fight his way out. According to Finn Hødnebo, it is not made explicit in Norwegian law whether people who set fire to houses did so with murder in mind.³⁰ The Old Gulathing Law paragraphs 98 and 99 distinguish between fire set by a so-called “unfriendly hand” or not. However, while a person who caused fire without being “unfriendly” should restore what he had burned down “to full value”, the punishment was indeed severe if the fire was started with an “unfriendly hand”. If convicted, the perpetrator “shall be outlawed and shorn of all personal rights (*utlagr oc uheilagr*); and he shall be called a firewolf (*heitir brennuvargr*) and shall have forfeited all his property to the last penny, both land and movables.”³¹ This severe punishment and harsh terminology (especially *vargr*; see below) indicates that the perpetrator had done something more than burning down an empty dwelling or barn. Swedish legislation, particularly the provincial Law of East Gothia (*Østgøtalagen*), offers additional support for this interpretation. Someone who set fire to another’s house in order to let him burn shall be called a firewolf: (*heti kasnar warghær*; *kase* denotes a pile of logs), a compound term, which shows striking similarity to the Norwegian term quoted above.³² Ragnar Hemmer points out that what made this act heinous was not only the intention to kill people through burning, but an aggravating factor was the stealth with which it was done. The *Østgøtalagen* presumes that the arsonist (*warghær*) was “stealing” fire into another’s house.³³ However, this was not the only murderous *vargr* denied Christian burial.

The compound term *heimsoknar vargar* gives the impression of a *vargr* who was seeking out someone in order to attack him at home. In early Germanic society, since the house was enclosed by a safety zone, which accorded it higher legal protection, an attack on people at home was particularly reprehensible. Rebecca V. Colman discusses this crime in a wider Western European context, but without including Norwegian sources, argues that the original meaning of *heimsókn* was violent attack, which often resulted in someone being killed.³⁴ There is also every reason to believe that the *heimsoknar vargar* denied Christian burial in the Old Christian Law of the Eidsivating not only caused material damage to houses, but also caused personal injury. This interpretation is supported by paragraph 178

30 Hødnebo 1966, 694–695.

31 G 98, *NgL* I, 46–47; Larson 1935, 105.

32 Eb 31, ÖgL, Schlyter 1830 (ed.), 43: “Nu stial mapær eld i hus annars ok will han inne brænna. Þæn sum sua gør han heti kasnar warghær.”

33 Hemmer 1966, 693–694. Hemmer notes that while the term *morðbrännari/mordbrander* (which also alludes to stealthy “murderous” acts) is used in the mid-fourteenth century town laws of *Björköarätten* and the Town Law of King Magnus Eriksson as well as in Law of King Christopher of Bavaria (1442), the older term *kasnavargher* appears in several Swedish provincial laws.

34 Colman 1981, 95–110. For more focus upon Scandinavia, see Carlsson 1935 and Brink 2014.

“Concerning Housebreaking” in the Old Gulathing Law which states that it was a nothing crime to break into another person’s house to attack him.³⁵

While killing someone had two main classifications, murder and manslaughter, the earliest laws also drew distinctions between various kinds of stealing, and primarily that between robbery (*rán*) and theft.³⁶ While a robber (*ránsmaðr*) commits his depredations by daylight and makes his intentions clear, although he often uses violent methods, he is regarded as less reprehensible than the thief who works in secret or under the cover of night. The opening line in the Book of Theft in the Old Gulathing Law stipulates that anyone who desires to remain in the king’s realm shall refrain from stealing. The value of the stolen goods determined the punishment; an *ertog* or more qualified as theft, and the thief should be outlawed or slain. The amount which qualified for theft was rather small; in the Gulathing province an *ertog* amounted to approximately the value of 1/7 of a cow.³⁷ Similar rules also applied in the Frostathing.

Since in a (pre-)state society solving conflicts and enforcing the law depended upon the parties involved keeping to their agreements, it was paramount that promises of peace and security, whether temporary or permanent, were kept. There is every reason to believe that in Scandinavia elaborate rules on truce and pledge already existed in the Viking Age.³⁸ Evidence to this effect has survived outside Scandinavia; Vikings abroad confirmed peace with the Anglo-Saxons on ceremonial oaths (evidence has survived from the late 800s), Constantinople (in the tenth century), and with the Franks in the late 800s.³⁹

Grið refers to a limited period of peace and security granted to a law-breaker to enable him to put his affairs in order, or to peace and security that was enforced at certain times and in certain places, such as the assembly or on the way to and from the assembly.⁴⁰ This principle also carried great weight in later centuries, as letters of *grið* from the late Middle Ages and Early Modern period witness. These letters show that before a case was closed, it was subject to a public investigation in which the royal representative (*sýslumaðr*) or his aides, in cooperation with the local community where the crime had been committed, were in charge of gathering the evidence. During this period, a *grið*-letter was issued, which offered the offender

35 G 178, *NgL* I, 66; Larson 1935, 137, cf. E II 40, *NgL* I, 405.

36 See discussion of *rán* in *NgL* V, 505.

37 G 253, F XIV 12, *NgL* I, 82–83, 252–253; Larson 1935, 164–165, 397–398. According to G 223; Larson 1935, 151 the value of a cow was 2 ½ *øres*.

38 Only a fragment of a *trygða mal* has been preserved from Norway, in the Old Gulathing Law; G 320, *NgL* I, 110. However, a similar provision found in the Icelandic lawbook *Grágás* is possibly a Norwegian import. See, for instance, Sunde 2007.

39 Stein-Wilkshuis 2002, 155–168; Lund 1987, 255–269; Reuter 1992, 71.

40 *NgL* V, 248–249. *Grið* could also refer to peace and security at home, and a *griðmaðr* or *griðkona*, for instance, although not of the family, shared in the rights of the family they had been admitted into.

temporary legal protection (*grið*) in the name of the king.⁴¹ Ideally, a limited period of peace and security was followed by permanent protection and peace. *Trygð* has the sense of protection, peace, and settlement confirmed by oath; it was used particularly in cases of manslaughter and revenge, and someone who broke a peace pledge (*trygðar*) was a pledge-breaker (*tryggrofi*).⁴² *Trygð* made under oath was of great importance in the Nordic countries from the Viking Age and at least until the late Middle Ages, where legal procedures were normally not put down on parchment, a contrast with procedure under canon law, which relied on written testimonials to a much greater extent.⁴³ A pledge-breaker may also be someone who withheld wergeld money, which several paragraphs in the Old Gulathing Law attest.⁴⁴ If someone accused of breaking a *grið* or a *trygð* was unable to be defended with a threefold oath, this person became an outlaw, and was therefore appropriately designated a *griðnidingr* or a *tryggrofi*.⁴⁵ It was probably fitting that because they had violated the legal process and placed the peaceful resolution of conflicts in jeopardy, they were denied Christian burial.

Principles of Exclusion

After this survey of various outlaws denied burial according to the early medieval Christian laws, it is necessary to discuss the ideologies which underlie the basis of exclusion in the first place. Central to this understanding are two terms which were frequently used to reinforce the description of this particular outlaw, *niðingr* and *vargr*, either one of these terms, or both combined.

As noted above, *nið* was part of an ancient tradition in North Germanic societies, and I endorse Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's view that old Norse society revolved around a militant concept of morality.⁴⁶ The concept of *nið* entailed that some misdeeds were unworthy of a warrior, and this concept of honour and loyalty within the group also applied to the armed merchants of late Viking Age Scandinavia and, in a wider context, it is probably correct to say this principle permeated society as a whole.⁴⁷

These ideas may help to explain why some outlaws were denied Christian burial in early medieval Norwegian law. Outlaw (*útlagr*) was a general term, and we often have to rely on the context or additional terms to decide whether the outlaw had

41 Imsen 1998, 489–490; Hamre 1977, 259–264; Agerholt 1965, 297–298.

42 F IX 19, *NgL* I, 213, Larson 1935, 337.

43 Nilsson 1989, 271.

44 G §§ 316–319, *NgL* I, 106–109; Larson 1935, 201–210.

45 F V 9, *NgL* I, 178; Larson 1935, 284–285.

46 Meulengracht Sørensen 1980, 24.

47 Jesch 2001, 258–261.

committed an irredeemable crime or not. We have seen above that *nið* is one such distinguishing term, and it is clearly evident that an outlaw was not necessarily a *niðingr*. For instance, paragraph 314 in the Old Gulathing Law stresses this distinction. G 314 concerns men in longships, Vikings, who could be outlaws but whether they were branded as nithings or not was dependent upon whether they renounced the peace before they started raiding.⁴⁸ This is in line with the principle of distinguishing between murder and manslaughter, theft and robbery. It was the lack of public declaration of intent, the clandestine and unmanly way in which the wrong was done which made an otherwise redeemable act irredeemable. Therefore it seems that the outlaws explicitly debarred from the churchyard according to the oldest Christian laws had committed nithing-crimes, which went against the Viking Age code of conduct.

Another interesting facet is the relationship between the *niðingr* and the *vargr*. While a murderer was branded a *niðingr*, he could very well also be a *vargr*. This is an ambiguous term; in Old Norse it could mean outlaw as well as a wolf, but it is probably significant that the word for the animal itself, wolf (*úlfr*) is never chosen in these legal compound terms, probably because it is not strong enough or precise enough. The concept of the outlaw or criminal encapsulated in the term *vargr* stretched back prior to the Viking Age, and it may even have been common Germanic.⁴⁹ It is difficult to assess the use of the various “wargish” compound terms in Old Norse chronologically, but it is probably significant that whereas such terms occur in the family sagas (*Íslendingasögur*) describing events that took place in the tenth and early eleventh centuries but which were written down in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, none are found in the *Sturlunga Saga* (events that took place 1117–1264).⁵⁰ This way of designating outlaws in the Icelandic sources is probably an import from Norway, since the only indigenous Icelandic mammal is the arctic fox.

The image of the outlaw as the *vargr* has caught the attention of scholars since the early nineteenth century.⁵¹ While some consider the association between the criminal and the *vargr* as symbolic, others think this association was something more than the criminal being cast in the image of the wild wolf living in the wilderness, hunted by all. Building upon older research and comparing a wide range of sources, continental, English and Old Norse, Mary Gerstein presents some interesting ideas. She argues that the criminal by means of a magical-legal pronouncement was transformed into a *vargr*, a monstrous evildoer who was “not human”; something

48 G 314, *NgL* I, 103, where the following formulations occur: “outlaws but not nithings” / (*utlager oc eigi niðingar*) and “they are outlaws and nithings too” / (*þa ero þeir utlager. oc niðingar*); Larson 1935, 198–199.

49 Gerstein 1974.

50 Vatne Ersland 2001, 20.

51 See overview in Gerstein 1974.

far worse than the animal wolf. Thus, according to Gerstein, there was more than an allegorical association between the criminal and the *vargr*.⁵²

At this point, I think it is important to underline that whether a physical transformation from man to beast actually took place is not important. What matters is whether Viking Age and early medieval people actually believed a transformation like this possible.⁵³ Although the earliest written Old Norse evidence is sparse, it is consistent. Therefore, I endorse Gerstein's claim that *vargr* is an old term which survives as a *terminus technicus* for a particular subclass of outlaw who had committed odious crimes. More evidence has recently been published which supports the view that the association between *vargr* and outlaw or criminal is very old, and that at one time this notion was probably recognized among most, if not all, of the Germanic peoples. For instance, while no examples which attest that an odious criminal was designated as a *vargr* are found in Anglo-Saxon law, other sources attest to the earlier existence of this association. In a study of execution sites and cemeteries, Andrew Reynolds has found fifteen instances of place-names in Anglo-Saxon charter bounds where *warg* is used in combination with other terms to describe execution sites, the earliest dating to 891.⁵⁴

As we have seen above, some outlaws were clearly worse than others. *Vargr* was a technical term for outlaws guilty of especially heinous crimes which were committed in a underhand and unmanly way, characteristics which also fit the description of crimes committed by a *niðingr*.

Medieval literature from all over Europe, including old Norse society, provides evidence that the undead frequently had led an evil life, and continued his evil ways after death.⁵⁵ A good death was tame, according to Philippe Ariès.⁵⁶ As far as outlaws were concerned, however, death was often violent. In medieval Norway, it seem clear that the pre-Christian Viking-age ideology concerning crime and punishment, nothing-crimes which were frequently committed by a *vargr*, was adapted to ecclesiastical needs when the oldest paragraphs distinguishing between in-groups and out-groups in the churchyard were worked out. The notion of the irredeemable outlaw who had to be excluded from society, placed outside the law, was ingrained in popular custom. This made the next step much simpler: the deceased but still irredeemable outlaw also had to be excluded from the society of the Christian dead, the churchyard.

52 Gerstein 1974, 133–134.

53 Well into the early modern period it is evidenced that creatures which we today would regard as ridiculous and at best superstitious actually played a part in court cases in Norway, for instance trolls and changelings. At least by the late seventeenth century, a distinction between popular and elite beliefs is discernible; the elite no longer seem to take such creatures seriously, while they still existed for the populace at large. See Knutsen & Riisøy 2007, 42–48.

54 Reynolds 1997, 38. See also Reynolds 2009.

55 Caciola 1996, 3–45.

56 Ariès 1981.

New Times, New Principles

Norwegian law was transformed between the late twelfth and the late thirteenth centuries in many ways.⁵⁷ These alterations also affected rules on burial, and new categories were added to those variously denied Christian burial, including assassins, robbers, excommunicates, and usurers (and some manuscripts include adulterers as well). In addition, the Old Christian Frostathing Law and Archbishop Jon's Christian Law of 1273 contain some special rules.

Some of these additions can be linked to legislation to ensure the king's peace, a common European phenomenon, which was stepped up during the early years of Magnus Erlingsson's reign (1161–1184).⁵⁸ The Old Gulathing Law, particularly the Christian law section, was thoroughly revised, possibly at a meeting in Bergen in 1163 or 1164 in connection with the crowning of King Magnus.⁵⁹ In paragraph 32, "Magnus made this new ordinance", robbers, "whether they plunder men on shipboard or on land" and assassins (*flugu menn*) were declared irredeemable outlaws.⁶⁰ These rulings have also been included in the Old Frostathing Law, F V 45.⁶¹ As I have discussed above, in older legislation a robber was given a more "honourable" treatment because his intentions were fairly clear, whereas in the late twelfth century he was degraded to the legal status of the skulking thief. The *flugumenn*, literally "men of flies", were possibly given their name because they were the image of enticement, like the flies tempting the fish to bite.⁶² Frederic Amory has used primarily Icelandic sources to show that the "men of flies" were also easily fooled; in ninety percent of attempted assassinations, the outlaw-assassin is killed himself.⁶³ In order to further peace in the country, late twelfth century Norwegian law decreed that hired assassins could no longer hide behind their employers, but were made personally responsible and their deeds became a royal plea.

In the 1170s during Archbishop Eystein's episcopacy (1161–1188), the Christian law section in the Old Frostathing Law was thoroughly revised and the strong influence of canon law is palpable.⁶⁴ The Frostathing law applied to the province where the archbishop had his seat, and it is not therefore surprising that this law also has a strong focus on the peace of God; a person who threatens, wounds or slays someone with a weapon forbidden in the Church or the churchyard was

⁵⁷ Riisøy 2009.

⁵⁸ Helle 1974, 95, 100–101.

⁵⁹ Helle 2001, 17–23.

⁶⁰ G 32, *NgL* I; Larson 1935, 58–59.

⁶¹ F V 45, *NgL* I; Larson 1935, 290–291.

⁶² *NgL* V, 198.

⁶³ Amory 1992, 200.

⁶⁴ Archbishop Eystein's role in the revision of this law and the influence of canon law has been discussed by Erik Gunnes in particular; see Gunnes 1996, 149–171; Gunnes 1970, 127–149; Gunnes 1974, 109–121.

excluded from burial. Burial was however possible if the bishop consented, and the perpetrator had “formerly been a decidedly peace-loving man” and his kinsmen would honour the Church where the peace was broken with money or gifts.⁶⁵

The Old Christian Frostathing Law does not enumerate a long list of specific outlaws denied burial, but did exclude someone who “had been separated from his Christian faith while he was still living” (*eða hann hafe veret fra kristni skilder meðan hann uar lifs*).⁶⁶ According to Bertil Nilsson, it is not entirely clear whether “had been separated from one’s Christian faith” alludes to the unbaptized or excommunicates or both; but most likely it concerns excommunicates who had been separated from Christianity, that is the Church.⁶⁷

Nilsson has pointed out that the question of whether excommunicates were allowed Christian burial or not was debated in Norway at the latest about the year 1200, because in a letter now lost, the archbishop of Nidaros (present-day Trondheim) had asked Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) for advice on this topic. We know of the existence of this letter because of the Pope’s reply, and here we learn that “we may not communicate with those persons dead with whom we have not communicated while they lived”.⁶⁸ In the letter, the Pope also stressed that if excommunicates were buried in the churchyard they were to be removed, but only if it was possible to identify them. In the mid-thirteenth century Christian laws, people who died while excommunicate were added to the list of people excluded from the churchyard.⁶⁹ Excommunicates could be regarded as a kind of spiritual outlaw, and the link between an incorrigible excommunicate and an *ipso facto* outlaw is attested in the Christian laws, possibly from the late twelfth century. The Old Christian Frostathing Law stipulates that an excommunicate who did not repent and concluded his affairs within a specific time, should be summoned by the bishop’s bailiff before an assembly and declared an outlaw.⁷⁰ The injunction to expel excommunicates from the churchyard if it was possible to identify their bones was analogously applied to the various categories of outlaws denied burial in the mid-thirteenth century Christian laws.

It is also possible that someone who “had been separated from his Christian faith while he was still living” had a broader application than simply the excommunicates,

65 F II 10, *NgL* I, 134; Larson 1935, 229–230.

66 F II 15, *NgL* I, 135; Larson 1935, 232.

67 Nilsson (1989, 242) points out that, the legal expression for excommunication was normally “*skildir fra heilagri kirkiu*”; *NgL* V, 567.

68 Nilsson 1989, 40 refers to DN XVII, no. 10 [1200]. LatDok no.39; Vandvik 1959, 125–127. The Pope answers a request from Archbishop Eirik of Nidaros (archep. 1189–1213), then living in exile in Denmark because of the quarrel with the King. As Vandvik points out, the contact with the Pope was most likely initiated because of the excommunication of King Sverre Sigurdsson (r. 1184–1202) and his followers. Cf. X 3.28.12: “*Si ossa excommunicatorum sunt sepulta in ecclesiastico coemeterio, et discerni possunt, debent exhumari et proiici; alias secus.*”

69 These were *excommunicati major* (*bandsættir menn*) and *excommunicatio minor* (*þæir er tælia oc fræmia rangan atrunað firir mannum*), see *NgL* V, 88, 200.

70 F III 21, *NgL* I, 154; Larson 1935, 254. This rule is also found in, J 60, *NgL* II, 382.

and also referred to un-Christian behaviour in general. Again the outlaws are brought into the picture.

The oldest Christian laws had already explicitly associated outlaws with un-Christian conduct. According to the Old Christian Borgarthing Law, an outlaw not only lost legal protection and absolutely all he owned, he was also often exiled to a heathen country. During the eleventh century a “heathen country” may, to some extent, have existed in remote parts of Norway and Sweden and around the Baltic. Some provisions add that the act of becoming an outlaw is a refusal to be a Christian. Thus the outlaw chooses to be a heathen, and therefore he shall never again be allowed in a country where Christians live.⁷¹ Presumably this expulsion also assumed an element of purification: not only getting rid of troublemakers, but also delivering the country from all non-Christian beings. According to Absalon Taranger, Anglo-Saxon Church law is a possible source of inspiration. In Anglo-Saxon England in the first decades of the eleventh century, persistent opposition to the Church commands normally led to expulsion from the country, which was thus delivered from un-Christian beings.⁷² In the Norwegian Christian laws, we also find this idea manifest in prohibitions on having heathens in the country. Even someone who gave the heathen food risked a heavy fine.⁷³ This line of thought is discernible in the rules on burials: not only was removal of the outlaws’ remains required, but the Church risked staying without a service until the bodies had been taken away.⁷⁴ Thus, the body of an outlaw continued to pose a threat, and his impurity did not cease with death.

So-called *okr karlar*, which literally means “usury men”,⁷⁵ were also denied burial; one exception is two manuscripts of the New Christian Gulathing Law, which exclude *horkallar* (literally “whoring men”) rather than the *okr karlar*.⁷⁶ Usury was a new crime in high medieval Norway. In pre-Christian and early Christian society, a man who had sexual relations with any other woman but his own wife risked being

71 For example, outlawry because of incest in the first degree, B I 15, *NgL* I, 350; murder of a newborn, B I 3, *NgL* I, 340; refusal to baptize a newborn within 12 months, B I 4, *NgL* I, 341; divorce without proper cause B II 6, *NgL* I, 355, cf. B III 6, and failure to pay tithes, B I 11, *NgL* I, 346. We also find traces of this in the *Old Christian Eidsivathing Law*, E I 52, *NgL* I, 392 on incest and E I 27, *NgL* I, 384, concerning meat-eating.

72 Taranger 1890, 299–300.

73 G 22, *NgL* I, 13; Larson 1935, 61.

74 F II 10, *NgL* I, 134; Larson 1935, 230.

75 This is a prohibition which found inspiration in canon law; Nilsson 1989, 264. Nilsson, however, is of the opinion that, compared with canon law, this indicates that the *Old Christian Eidsivathing Law* cannot be older than the late 1230s. However, as pointed out by Lars Hamre (1967, 491), “*okr karlar*” or “*manifesti usurariis*” may be a later interpolation since the oldest manuscripts of this law are all later than 1300.

76 *NgL* II, 292, 314, MSS. D as well as MSS. A from the beginning of the fourteenth century. The term *hór* was normally applied for adultery, which was possibly made a crime in Archbishop Eystein’s late twelfth-century revision of the Old Christian Frostathing Law according to Gunnes 1996, 160.

killed; for the offended party compensation clearly was a less honourable option.⁷⁷ Adultery was criminalised in the Frostathing law province in the 1170s, and in the 1260s outlawry was decreed for adulterers who were utterly obstinate and refused to cease their behaviour.⁷⁸ At the same time, the Old Christian Frostathing Law decreed that “wicked men” who run away “with the wives of other men” shall be regarded as forever outside the law and were denied “burial at Church.”⁷⁹ In this context, the expression “run away” probably refers to the abduction of women, while in the later Middle Ages it could also refer to a more gender-neutral extramarital affair, in which women also took a more active part.⁸⁰ Thus whether the woman consented or not, adultery was considered a reprehensible crime and the sentence might extend to the churchyard.

As we have seen in the oldest legislation, categories of irredeemable outlaws like murderers and thieves were denied Christian burial. According to Nilsson, the Norwegian principles of exclusion basically follow canon law, while some categories are peculiar to Norway, the *gríðniðinga* and the *tryggrova*.⁸¹ This perhaps mirrors the great importance these procedures played in Old Norse society, which hardly relied on written evidence, but on people keeping their oaths and promises.

The Christian laws of the mid-thirteenth century also introduce a few exceptions to the rules denying burial. If a person called on the priest before dying and confessed, then the priest had the power to grant permission for a Christian burial. In addition, the outlaw’s heir was also obliged to compensate for the deceased outlaw’s crimes. However, convicted thieves, murderers, robbers, and people who were not baptized were not allowed any reprieve.⁸² Ideally, a member of the Church who had repented, confessed, and thus become reintegrated into the community of all Christians was entitled to a Christian burial. Therefore denial of burial in consecrated ground was a second punishment in addition to the sentence proper. However, the threat of having one’s remains interred in unconsecrated ground might

77 I have discussed this aspect of the legislation in Riisøy 2003, 163–167. The right to kill for revenge in the provincial Gulathing laws, § 160 and the Frostathing IV § 39, list seven women (*NgL* I, 62–63, 169–170; Larson 1935, 132, 273–274). According to the Old Christian Borgarthing Law, version II, § 15, (*NgL* I, 358) *lendmenn* (who had obtained land from the king) and *hauddar*, (who were important farmers and who may have ranked alongside earls during the Viking Age) had a right to kill for revenge against thirteen categories of female relatives. According to the Old Christian Borgarthing Law, the further a man descended the social ladder, the proportionally fewer female relatives he could protect from sexual advances from other men through the right to kill. In addition, female slaves and servants were under the authority of the *paterfamilias* with regard to their sexuality, but in their case family honour was not considered to have been insulted to such a degree that it justified killing. Rather, the head of the family could claim economic compensation in proportion to the woman’s position within the household, G § 198, see also F XI 21, *NgL* I, 70–71, 234; Larson 1935, 143–144, 369.

78 *NgL* I, 459; *NgL* II, 454.

79 F Introduction § 10, *NgL* I, 123; Larson 1935, 216. This rule was probably added by Håkon Håkonsson in ca. 1260, Hagland & Sandnes 1994, XXXI.

80 Riisøy 2009, 25–28.

81 Nilsson 1989, 289.

82 NB I 8, *NgL* II, 296, NG I 16, *NgL* II, 314–315, NB II 10, *NgL* IV, 166, J 16, *NgL* II, 350.

have acted as a powerful deterrent to potential criminals. This view is also reflected in the New Christian Borgarthing Law II of 1267–1268 because henceforth the king's approval was also required to obtain a Christian burial for outlaws, as well as for "cases of irredeemable outlawry according to the Christian laws" (*wbota malom y christnom rette*).⁸³

The Protracted High Middle Ages and the Reformation

The Catholic faith was rejected with the Reformation,⁸⁴ and Christian III (r. 1534–1559) ratified a church decree in Latin on 2 September 1537, which with minor changes was translated into Danish two years later.⁸⁵ For Norway, this decree of 1539 was intended to be merely an interim regulation, but it was only in 1607 that a Norwegian church decree was issued.⁸⁶ In his forthcoming study on dishonourable death in early Reformation period Norway, Arne Bugge Amundsen points out that since the decree of 1539 does not contain any rules on exclusion from the churchyard, the medieval Christian laws were an obvious place to look for guidance.⁸⁷ The medieval Christian laws were often translated and diligently written into the law-books in the post-Reformation sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and we also know that they were applied in ecclesiastical lawsuits during this period.⁸⁸

Bugge Amundsen draws attention to a burial sermon preached by Superintendent⁸⁹ Jørgen Eriksen in 1578.⁹⁰ According to the superintendent, so-called "ungodly people" should not be buried together with "God's chosen children",

83 NB II 10, NgL IV, 160, see also 166–167: "*En om da men som før ere talde tiuffue, mordere, och ransmen maa ey y kirkegaard komme wdenne kongens samtyke see till med, och det samme huarueta der som kongsomenom ber med halfft sekt, aa wbota malom y christnom rette*". This addition is not found NB I 8, NgL II, 296; NG I 16, NgL II, 314–315, J 16, NgL II, 350, NB II 12, NgL II, 330–331.

84 In Denmark and Norway, the Reformation was implemented by King Christian III after a protracted civil war. On 30 October 1536, Christian issued a royal charter which stated that Norway should no longer exist as an independent country but become a province of Denmark, and on the same day the Catholic Church in Denmark was abolished. In 1537, the last Catholic Archbishop left Norway, and Christian signed a new Lutheran Church Order or Ordinance, which was accepted in Norway in the same year. For an overview, see Montgomery 1996, 147–179.

85 Amongst other things, the church decree enjoined rules regarding faith, choice of ecclesiastical personnel, and moral conduct. The church decrees of 1539 and 1537 were published in *Kirkeordinansen 1537/39: Det danske Udkast til Kirkeordinansen (1537)*; *Ordinatio Ecclesiastica Regnorum Daniæ et Norwegiæ et Ducatum Sleswicensis Holtsatiæ etc. (1537)*; *Den danske Kirkeordinans (1539)* by Martin Schwarz Lausten.

86 Kolsrud 1917, 189–190, 193, 199–205.

87 I would like to express my thanks to Professor Bugge Amundsen (University of Oslo), who gave me access to his manuscript before it went to print.

88 Kolsrud 1917, 185–211; Bang 1895, 158–160; Riisøy 2009.

89 Superintendent was introduced as an alternative title for a bishop after the Reformation.

90 Bugge Amundsen 2015.

but in places where they would be eaten by birds and animals. According to the superintendent, “ungodly people” had flagrantly profaned or despised the name of God and the sacraments, and they ought to be buried underneath gallows or other places outside the churchyard as warning examples for other ungodly people.

Translations into Danish of the Norwegian medieval Christian laws were circulating in various versions, and Bugge Amundsen found that they were important when the Norwegian superintendents in 1604 made a draft of a Norwegian church ordinance. The draft of 1604 has an extensive chapter on churches on churchyards, which is not included in the final version of the church decree of 1607 but, as noted by Bugge Amundsen, the draft can tell us how Post-Reformation ecclesiastics reflected and debated on this matter. The churchyard should be available for “every honest human being”. Characteristically for Lutheran notions, which considered faith alone sufficient for salvation, the draft added that “being interred in the churchyard is no guarantee of salvation; likewise, being interred outside the churchyard does not automatically lead to perdition”. Then follows a familiar quote from the Christian laws on exclusion from burials, and then with a novel twist referring to Jeremiah 22:19, stating that there are people who are deserving of “the burial of a donkey – dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem”.⁹¹ The church ordinance of 1607 does not contain such details, but it suffices to decree that all Christians were to be buried in the churchyard or in the church, but with the knowledge of the “leading men” of the church, presumably a priest or bishop. The rule went on to stipulate that no one was to be buried outside the churchyard who deserved to be in it, a formulation which presupposes that there were dead people who did not belong in the churchyard.⁹² As Bugge Amundsen points out, the Church obviously tried to ensure some sort of control over burials in consecrated ground. The Church Ritual from 1685 and King Christian V’s Norwegian and Danish laws from the same period decreed that executed criminals were not be buried before the authorities and the claimants were satisfied.⁹³

91 Bugge Amundsen 2015.

92 Bugge Amundsen 2015.

93 Bugge Amundsen 2015, refers to Danmarks og Norgis Kirke-Ritual 1685, 335; *Kong Christian Den Femtis Norske Lov*, 1687, 2-10-4.



Picture 2. This scene shows the execution of Philotas, son of Parmenion who was Alexander the Great's general. Philotas was accused of failure to report a conspiracy against Alexander. For this, was tried, tortured and executed in 330 B.C.E. Medieval miniaturists depicted the execution as a beheading, befitting a high-ranking soldier and nobleman.

From Principles to Practice

A handful of legal cases have survived which show that the rules excluding outlaws from the churchyard were known among the populace, who occasionally tried to evade these rules in order to give deceased relatives who died as outlaws burial in the churchyard. On the other hand, the authorities tried to ensure that the rules that excluded the same outlaws from the churchyard were applied. Because the medieval rules on burial still had effect in the sixteenth century after the Reformation, a few late sixteenth-century cases will also be referred to.



Picture 3. This burial scene is from a fifteenth-century German manuscript telling the story of Barlaam and Josaphat, early Christian saints. However, the legend is modelled on the life of Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha.

In 1443, the bishop of Bergen instructed all the priests in town to command the monks who had buried a criminal in their churchyard to dig him up and remove him. If this command was disregarded, the monks would be excommunicated and the churchyard placed under interdict.⁹⁴ Whether the monks did as they were told we do not know, but a diploma from 1492 gives evidence that commands to remove illegally buried corpses from the churchyard were not always adhered to.

94 DNI no. 786.

The diploma narrates how Bishop Eilif of Stavanger (d. 1512~1513) pardoned a family for failing to carry out the dean's order to exhume and remove the body of an outlaw from the churchyard. The bishop stated rather laconically that the outlaw's body "shall have to rest in the churchyard because it is buried together with the corpses of other good Christians" (*maa liggæ nu framdeles i kirkæ gardh som kommen er med andhrom godæ kristnæ manne liik*).⁹⁵ The bishop's resignation in this situation reflects stipulations in the revised Christian Laws of the mid-thirteenth century which state that bodies that had been buried illegally, but which had been in the ground for so long that it was no longer possible to "distinguish their bones from the bones of other Christian people" (*skilia bein thieris fra annar christna manna beinom*), should remain *in situ*.⁹⁶

Fear of damnation was always present in medieval people, who viewed their short and brutal earthly existence as merely preparation for the eternal life. In an age where the belief in the resurrection of the body on the Day of Judgement was firmly dependent upon whether the deceased had received a Christian burial or not (although theologians may not have taken such a clear-cut view), the question of whether punishment precluded burial in consecrated ground was an important one. Similar principles applied in the Protestant tradition.⁹⁷ Therefore, threats of heavy fines and expenses relating to the re-consecration of the churchyard did not stop people from at least trying to bury their outlawed relatives and friends there.

Although serious attempts were made to keep condemned criminals out of the churchyard, this process also worked the other way. It was imperative that people who had a place among the society of the Christian dead were not excluded, and the mid-thirteenth century Christian laws stipulated a fine if someone interred a body entitled to a Christian burial outside the churchyard.⁹⁸ I have not come across any evidence of medieval legal practice regarding this, but the process of including people wrongfully excluded from the churchyard is evidenced in two cases which were brought before the *Herredag* in the late sixteenth century. When the king and the Council of the Realm sat together during meetings (called *Herredag* in Denmark in the sixteenth and the first part of the seventeenth century), they were acting as the highest court in the kingdom. The first is a case of adultery, which was reopened by the *Herredag* in Oslo in 1585.⁹⁹ The court concluded that judicial murder had been committed. The previous judgement was annulled, and the twelve jurors who had passed it were ordered to exhume the body from the place of execution and to transfer it to the churchyard for a proper burial.¹⁰⁰

95 DN I, no. 975.

96 NB II 10, *NgL* IV, 166–167, NB I 8, *NgL* II, 296, NG I 16, *NgL* II, 314–315, J 16, *NgL* II, 350.

97 Koslofsky 1995, 327–328.

98 See references in Appendix 1.

99 Protocols from the *Herredag* have been preserved, beginning in 1578; they continue until the early 1660s, and have been published in six volumes by Thomle 1893–1903.

100 Thomle 1893–1903, III, 63–67.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, documents from the *Herredag* in Trondheim from 1597 show that a man called Mikkel brought an action against the steward. In the name of the relatives of the poor tailor Søren Madsen, Mikkel had paid the steward 10 *riksdalers* to assure that the heretic Søren was buried in the churchyard. Exactly what crime the heretic had committed we do not know. During the later Middle Ages and early modern period it seems that sexual perversion in particular became associated with ideas about religious/moral perversion, and the term *kjetteri* [heresy] occasionally appears in legal documents and judgements in connection with the most reprehensible sexual crimes.¹⁰¹ In this case, it cannot be ruled out that the term *kjetteri* denotes controversial theological views. It was, after all, only sixty years since a new confession had been introduced. Discussing Lutheran funerals in the post-Reformation sixteenth century, Craig Koslofsky shows how popular conceptions of pollution influenced questions pertaining to burial. The deceased without the proper “confession” were seriously at risk of being considered heretics, and thus denied burial in the communal churchyard.¹⁰² To proceed with the case above; when the steward had the heretic’s head “placed on a pole and his corpse placed underneath” (*sette paa en steigle och legemit under neden*), Mikkel of course asked to have his money back. The steward argued in his defence that he had received the ten *riksdalers* in order to change the punishment from burning at the stake to beheading, but the court was not convinced. When it could be shown that the governor Ludvig Munk (1537–1602) had issued an open letter to the effect that the tailor was to be buried in the churchyard, the 10 *riksdalers* were returned to Mikkel.¹⁰³

These few cases give a glimpse of how burials were controlled. The oldest Christian laws had already prescribed fines to the bishop for improper burial, and snapshots from the late Middle Ages indicate that the bishop may have played an active part. One of the cases shows that the dean was also involved, but without any effect. After the Reformation, secular courts clearly had some control over this process, but we only have evidence from two cases, which were dealt with by the *Herredag*, the highest court in the kingdom. At a local level, priests might have been more actively involved; Johannes Steenstrup discusses how Danish priests in Seeland towards the end of the sixteenth century were reluctant to grant burial to outlaws and other criminals.¹⁰⁴ The situation in Norway might have been similar. Admittedly, the evidence from legal practice is rather meagre, but it is enough to show that rules denying the burial of outlaws in consecrated ground were applied to a certain extent. But where were outlaws buried?

101 Riisøy 2009, 50–54.

102 Koslofsky 1995, 327–329, 332, 336–337.

103 Thomle 1893–1903, IV, 45–46.

104 Steenstrup 1930–1931, 408–409.

Disposal of Outlaws Excluded from Christian Burial

According to the Old Christian Gulathing Law, the most suitable place to inhumate outlaws excluded from Christian burial was on the shore (*flōðar male*) where “the tide meets the green sod.”¹⁰⁵ A similar stipulation is enacted in the Old Christian Law of the Eidsivathing,¹⁰⁶ and it was retained in the mid-thirteenth century Christian laws. Nilsson points out that this ruling has no parallels in canon law, and he suggests that this location was chosen to avoid corpses being placed back in the heathen burial mounds.¹⁰⁷ It should be noted that the Old Christian Gulathing Law explicitly prohibits burials in “a mound or heap of stones.”¹⁰⁸ Nilsson puts forward the plausible suggestion that the inhumations of outlaws mirror their outcast status in life. Thus in death, they did not belong to the earth, nor to the water.¹⁰⁹ Andrew Reynolds quotes a similar rationale from early modern England. When the case of the Gunpowder Plot, the failed assassination attempt against King James I (r. 1603–1625) of 1605 undertaken by English Catholics, was heard in 1606, the convicted were to be “hanged up by the neck between heaven and earth, as deemed unworthy of both, or either.”¹¹⁰

But why, exactly, was the shore chosen? It seems that only one episode from the Old Norse sources describes the shore as appropriate for burial. According to the *Book of the Settlement of Iceland (Landnámabók)*, one of the earliest Christians in Iceland expressed her wish to be buried on the shore (*flōðarmálet*) in order to avoid burial in unconsecrated ground. Since the shore was not consecrated either, it was a geographical location which was neutral.¹¹¹

This particular placement of the dead was perhaps not connected with deviant burial in the first place. As Leszek Gardela points out, Viking Age burials showed great variety, and some so-called deviant burials may in fact have been relatively normal.¹¹² An analysis of Viking Age burials at Kaupang (Skiringssal) situated along the coast of South-Eastern Norway also concludes that there were various contemporary concepts relating to death and burials. However, the placement of the burials in the landscape relates to transitional zones, the mountains or the shore. As ship burials attest, the sea was also somewhat related to concepts of death. The idea of the “holy mountain” can be traced in Iceland (*Eyrbyggjasaga*), and is probably a tradition brought over from Norway but later forgotten in the

105 G 23, *NgL* I, 13: “*scal grava i flōðar male. Þar sem særr mœtesc oc grøn torva*”; Larson 1935, 51.

106 E I 50, *NgL* I, 392.

107 Nilsson 1989, 276.

108 G 23, *NgL* I, 13; Larson 1935, 51–52.

109 Nilsson 1989, 276; Reynolds 1997.

110 Reynolds 1997, 38.

111 Nilsson 1989, 277.

112 Gardela 2013.

home country.¹¹³ However, after the change of religion when all dead Christians belonged within the sacred churchyard, the outsiders had to be placed somewhere else, and the shore was known for burials after all. An interesting addition in the New Christian Borgarthing Law, NB II 10, explains that the shore was chosen for deviant burials because here they cannot cause damage or desecration.¹¹⁴ A shore is normally stony, and stones heaped on top of executed corpses, may have prevented the unruly dead from walking. Perhaps there was also an idea that the sea, washing over the deviant dead, had some cleansing and regenerative effect.

The anthropologist Mary Douglas has been highly influential on questions of purity versus impurity in her studies of the differences between the sacred, the clean and the unclean in various societies. In agreement with the notion proposed by the historian of religion Mircea Eliade in *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, Douglas maintains that because water dissolves everything, it also gets rid of impurities as well as regenerating.¹¹⁵ Moreover, as Nancy Caciola points out, water was an important barrier in medieval thought about the dead; rivers, for instance, are often depicted as barriers between the realms of the living and the dead.¹¹⁶

In Viking Age and early medieval Norway and Iceland, water played an important part in the sentencing of sorcerers and witches, who were to be drowned and sunk to the bottom of the water. Folke Ström lists several examples from the sagas, which show that it was common practice to tie a stone round the neck of the culprit and then push him or her into the water. The practical advantage of the stone was that it facilitated the drowning while at the same time ensuring that the sorcerer would remain at the bottom of the sea or lake.¹¹⁷ Sexually abused animals were also drowned.¹¹⁸ Sorcerers, witches, revenants as well as sexually abused animals were clearly connected with moral perversion or pollution, and as a last resort they were also often burned. Some hundreds of years later, after the Reformation, possibly reinforced by Biblical inspiration, fire and burning had taken over as a more exclusive cleansing remedy in such cases. Once upon a time, however, water may have played a far greater part in getting rid of impurities.

In addition, some outlaws, in particular if they were considered to remain quiet after death, may have been buried where they were executed. For the post-Reformation period, Bugge Amundsen has found that an executed person was normally buried without further ceremony at the place of execution, which probably

113 Lia 2001, 45–46, 116–117.

114 *NgL* IV, 166: “*der som ingen er till meins eller skade*”. This addition does not seem to appear in the other manuscripts of the new Christian laws. According to *NgL* V, 441, *mein* has meanings like damage, outrage or desecrate.

115 Douglas 2002, 198–199.

116 Caciola 1996, 30.

117 G 28, *NgL* I, 17. See comments by Robberstad 1937, 43, Larson 1935, 56–57; Ström 1942, 171–173.

118 G 30, *NgL* I, 18, Larson 1935, 57.

accords well with medieval practice.¹¹⁹ The Old Frostathing Law (F XIV 12) points out that the king's bailiff should take a thief to the assembly, and from the assembly to the shore (*fiöru*) where he should find a man to slay the thief.¹²⁰ Although the paragraph does not state that the thief should be buried at the place of execution, it is perhaps not unreasonable to assume that this is what happened, in which case, the burial would have taken place on the shore. *Grágás* places the execution of an irredeemable outlaw as well as the burial of his body in one and the same location: "a place beyond bowshot of anyone's home field wall, where there is neither arable land nor meadow land and from where no water flows to the farm; [...]".¹²¹ It seems that *Grágás* also conceptualises a geographical neutrality or no-mans-land, a place which evades neat classification. Besides, the formulation "no water flows to the farm" might actually fit the description of the shore, because water which flows from the farm, would sooner or later normally flow to the shore on its way to the ocean. In any case, as outlaws were outcasts in life as well as in death, burial at a liminal place was appropriate. Burial under heaps of stones away from settlements was probably also an attractive option. For instance, *Sturlunga Saga* describes how criminals and outlaws were caught, summarily executed and buried under heaps of stone or in a rockslide.¹²² Burial under heaps of stone is also explicitly prescribed as suitable for deformed newborns in the Old Christian Borgarthing Law.¹²³

Separate cemeteries for criminals are not attested in early or high medieval Norway, but this might have changed during the later Middle Ages. Excavations of a cemetery in the small town of Skien in southern Norway, published by Gaute Reitan, evidences deviant burials from the period around the Reformation. The cemetery was in use from the late tenth century until approximately 1600. It went out of general use after the plague in the mid-fourteenth century but there are indications that it was subsequently used to bury people whose death sentence had been carried out at the town's place of execution Galgeholmen (i.e., Gallows skerry), which was a mere fifty metres away. This place name resembles other places of execution located outside Norwegian towns during the Middle Ages.¹²⁴ Three skeletons of people who had been beheaded were excavated, probably dating back to the Reformation period.

119 Bugge Amundsen 2015.

120 *NgL* I, 252–253; Larson 1935, 397–398.

121 §§ 2 and 131, Dennis *et al.* 1980, 30, 236. *Grágás* distinguishes between two types of outlaw; a lesser outlaw was sentenced to a three-year exile from Iceland, while a full outlaw or the so-called *skóggangsmadr* could be slain with impunity.

122 Kålund 1904 (vol. 1), 150 (year 1187) and 260–261 (year 1209).

123 Olavsson 1914, 3.

124 These have been discussed by Gade 1985, who included place-names with the prefix "gallows" in Iceland; see also Blom 1960, 163–165.



Picture 4. This *Allegory of Death and Fame* from 1518 relates to the *memento mori* theme by reminding that even the famous and the mighty end up as skeletons. The winged skeleton represents death, but it may be that the party is debating the deeds of the supine skeleton. The presence of Envy, the old hag with sagging breasts, may imply slanderous talk.

Two of the heads were facing downwards; the third had also been burnt in addition to the beheading, and the head had been placed between the legs. This is probably a very ancient and derogatory custom, perhaps to prevent the deceased from returning from the dead, and this practice is attested in other cultures too, in Anglo-Saxon England, amongst other places.¹²⁵ Prone burial had little to do with orthodox Christianity; Kristina Jonsson claims that it may possibly be set in relation to popular religion rooted in pre-Christian times.¹²⁶ As Jonsson also observes, people who had died a violent or dishonourable death would be more at risk of returning from the dead. Prone burials are often connected with punishment and humiliation, and it may also have prevented the dead from walking. John Blair points out that an inversion of the corpse would cause it to dig downwards when it tried to dig out, and such corpses therefore had to “bite the dust” as Gardela aptly puts it.¹²⁷

The same chronological layer at the cemetery in Skien also yielded five other skulls, nicely arranged in a half-circle. As Reitan explains, it is possible that these skulls had been displayed on posts as a warning to others before their burial in the

¹²⁵ G 241, *NgL* I, 80–81; Larson 1935, 160: “When the wergild shall be increased” states that if the head is severed from the body, and the head is placed between the feet, the wergild shall be doubled. As regards deviant burial and the dangerous dead in Anglo-Saxon and early medieval England, see Reynolds 2009; Blair 2009, 39–59.

¹²⁶ Jonsson 2009a, 97–98.

¹²⁷ Blair 2009, 549–550; Gardela 2013.

disused cemetery.¹²⁸ Decapitation followed by burning reflects a very conspicuous effort to make sure the dead had really been killed and gone once and for all. Whereas the medico-theological way of thinking the afterlife is spiritual, however, there clearly was a parallel tradition in Northern European beliefs, probably with roots in pre-Christian times, which saw the life force held within the flesh and bone.¹²⁹ Thus a corpse may possess vitality as long as it remained partly intact. A living dead who was able to hurt other people or animals, was clearly more flesh than spirit, and the Icelandic family sagas attest to this way of thinking.¹³⁰ Elements of such popular beliefs lingered on for centuries; in fact life after death was still considered to have a corporeal side well into the twentieth century. Among the general populace there were no contradictions between viewing life after death as a physical existence and the soul as being an immaterial substance which moved on.¹³¹

Conclusion

During the Viking Age, some acts were considered so reprehensible that the perpetrators were defined as the worst kind of outlaws, described in terms centring on the *vargr* and the *níðingr*. Thus they were forever declared “not humans” and placed outside the law. This way of thinking influenced the rules on burials in the earliest Christian laws, because with the arrival of Christianity the irredeemable outlaws were also outlawed from the community of the Christian dead. In practice, this means that certain categories of criminals were denied burial at the sacred churchyard, and the Church tried to enforce this prohibition. With some modifications, typically when the Church during the High Middle Ages added new categories of criminals to the list of categories of people excluded from Christian burial, this principle carried through the Middle Ages and well into the early modern period. The impurity of the bodies of dead outlaws did not cease with death and therefore burial at a liminal place such as the shore or under heaps of stones away from settlements was deemed appropriate.

128 Reitan 2005, 183–184.

129 Caciola 1996, 36–37.

130 This is further discussed in Kanerva 2011; Kanerva 2013a; Kanerva 2013b. See also Riisøy & Knutsen 2007.

131 Jonsson 2009b.

Abbreviations

Full bibliographical references to the works mentioned in the list below are given in the footnotes.

B	Old Christian Borgarthing Law
DN	<i>Diplomatarium Norvegicum</i>
E	Old Christian Law of the Eidsivathing
F	Old Frostathing Law
G	Old Gulathing Law
J	Archbishop Jon's Christian Law
KL	<i>Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid</i>
L	Landlaw of 1274
NB	New Christian Borgarthing Law
NG	New Christian Gulathing Law
NgL	<i>Norges gamle Love indtil 1387</i> (5 vols), I–V
SSGL	<i>Corpus iuris Sueo-Gotorum antiqui: Samling af Sweriges gamla Lagar</i> (13 vols)

Appendix 1: reference to particular outlaws and which law/paragraph they are listed.

	G 23	E II 40	E I 50	NB I 8; NG I 16, NB II 10	J 16
Traitors	X	X	X	X	X
Murder-wargs	X	X	X	X	X
Breakers of truces and pledges	X	X	X	X	X
Thieves	X	X	X	X	X
Breakers of temporarily legal protection		X	X	X	X
Arsonists		X	X		
Violent house-breakers		X			
Hired assassins			X	X	X
Robbers			X	X	X
Excommunicates			X	X	X
Usurers			X	X	X
(Male) adulterers				<i>horkallar</i> (2 MSS in NG I 16)	

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Parental Grief and Prayer in the Middle Ages: Religious Coping in Swedish Miracle Stories

Viktor Aldrin

Lund University

This article focuses on expressions of bereavement and religious coping in medieval miracle stories from Sweden. The stories come from the collections of St. Birgitta (Bridget) of Sweden, the Blessed Bishop Nicolaus Hermannii (Sw. Nils Hermansson) of Linköping and the Blessed Katarina of Vadstena, and were recorded in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Catherine M. Sanders's modern five stages of bereavement have been used as the theory of analysis through Kay Talbot's adaptation of the theory for parents in grief. This theoretical foundation has provided new insights into how parental grief was expressed in medieval Sweden – and in stark contrast to Continental research on the same topic. Parents of both sexes expressed their grief outwardly through tears and crying, and a reluctance to accept that their children were dead. Throughout the miracle stories, lay people constructed their own prayers for miraculous intervention without the aid of any priests. This makes fathers and mothers in medieval Sweden agents of their own in terms of praying to God and being able to construct their own forms of religious coping.

Introduction

The death of a child is one of the most feared things that could happen to a parent. Nonetheless, it happens, and causes grief not only among parents but also those close to the bereaved family.¹ While this is just as true today as it was in medieval society, some nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars such as Philippe Ariès believed that public emotions of mourning were not accepted or visible in the medieval period before the sixteenth century.² He emphasised this even further when considering parental expressions of mourning by claiming that parental emotions towards children were something that developed as a result of the

¹ See Avery & Reynolds 1999; Kaartinen 2014.

² Ariès 1983.

progression of the modern era.³ These conclusions have been refuted by scholars who have examined the dense levels of primary sources constituted by medieval miracle stories.⁴ It seems that scholars such as Ariès were not keen on accepting that parents grieved for the loss of their children regardless of modernisation and enlightenment.

The ways in which parents try to understand and survive the trauma of a dead child have often been described as coping strategies. Since all of the miracle stories examined here contain religious elements, and atheist attitudes were non-existent in the Middle Ages, the aspect of religion in coping strategies is of primary significance for this paper as the religious framework provides the bereaved with a context of meaning and support. No previous study has been published on coping strategies in a medieval context, but there are studies on the role religion plays in coping strategies for bereaved parents in modern society.⁵

The purpose of this chapter is to examine this religious coping among parents in the Middle Ages through the use of Swedish miracle stories. By “religious coping”, I mean coping strategies for confronting extreme situations in life, such as death and illness, which are constructed and established within a religious framework.⁶ It is not possible to use modern theories of grieving parents for their dead or dying children – a field of research of its own – without combining them with theories of miraculous intervention. The miracle of bringing a child back to life is a life-changing event and alters the way in which a parent understands his or her own existence. As a reader of medieval miracles, one comes into constant contact with parents whose lives have been transformed through divine intervention.

Mortality among children was, unfortunately, frequent in the Middle Ages, and the modern expectation of being outlived by one’s children was not considered the general rule. In fact, a great number of children died, and the catastrophe was therefore something considered as an ordinary reality rather than an extraordinary event. Each miracle story which concerns a dying or dead child deals with this ordinary situation – but with the difference that something extraordinary followed, the divine miracle, that led to the defeat of death. Still, for the absolute majority of children dying in the medieval period, there is nothing written about what happened and how the parents acted. Miracle stories provide considerable information about individual women and men, with every stratum of medieval society represented, although with an over-representation of the lower peasant stratum in the Nordic miracle stories. One should, however, not consider these miracle stories to be realistic and precise accounts of the normal procedures of the death of a child, since they were reported only after a successful miracle. Nonetheless, in some of the miracle stories information is provided about how parents reacted when they

3 Ariès 1975.

4 Cf. Finucane 2000; Krötzel 1989.

5 Klass 1991; Breslin & Lewis 2008.

6 Cf. Bänziger et al. 2008.

discovered or realised that their child was dead or dying, their emotional responses, as well as how the corpse was initially prepared for the funeral before the miracle altered the situation.

Miracle Stories as a Genre

Miracle stories consist of reported divine miracles. How then can a miracle be defined? If prayer can be understood as communication with the divine and entities close to the divine, miracles can similarly be defined as divine communication with human beings through extraordinary actions. God is understood in Christianity to be able to act in the human world *a priori* but miracles traditionally need to be asked for by someone before God performs them (and no one knows if a miracle will be performed at all). Miracle stories differ from other stories of disastrous events and thus cannot as such be properly analysed without this particular difference in mind – divine intervention. All miracles end with a positive outcome with the divine will revealing itself and healing the sick, which is traditionally the primary meaning of a miracle in Christianity.⁷ When a miracle story is recorded, those reporting it already knew the positive outcome and are interpreting the whole incident in this light. According to Niels Christian Hvidt, miracles need to have a combination of three aspects, none of which can be omitted. The first aspect is the nature of the miracle where God acts beyond or in ways different from the natural order. The second aspect is the psychology of the miracle, whereby the response of those present at the miraculous occurrence causes them to consider it an act of God. The third and final aspect is the symbolic meaning of the miracle by which God is seen and interpreted as wishing to communicate with the human race.⁸

The sources used in this chapter come from three of the largest miracle collections of medieval Sweden with a total of 450 miracles, which were recorded in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: Saint Birgitta of Sweden (ca. 1303–1373),⁹ her daughter the Blessed Katarina of Vadstena (1331/1332–1381)¹⁰ and the bishop of Linköping at that time, the Blessed Bishop Nicolaus Hermanni of Linköping (ca. 1326–1391).¹¹ The material is relatively homogenous since it comes from three presumed saints connected to the Brigittine Abbey of Vadstena. None of these miracle collections alone can provide sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge of how lay people formed religious practices, but combining the general and the specific brings unique insights into everyday religiosity and the practices of miracle praying.

7 Cf. Hvidt 2003, 14–17; Pawlikowski 2007.

8 Hvidt 2003, 14–17.

9 Collijn (ed.) 1924–1931.

10 Collijn (ed.) 1942–1946; Lundén (ed.) 1981.

11 Schück (ed.) 1873–1895. For numbered lists of all Swedish medieval miracles, see Myrdal & Bäärnhielm (1994, 133–156). The symbol # within square brackets, e.g., [Miracle #40], is used in my article to refer to the numbers in these lists.

In order to use miracle stories as a source for religious practices, certain source-critical problems must be dealt with. Miracle stories were usually recorded with the one primary purpose of advocating the canonisation of a deceased holy person. This avowed purpose, while obvious, does not make the source useless for other studies once it is identified. Source-critical analysis of miracle stories reveals vital information for use in identification and analysis of religious practices. Source-critical criteria for miracle stories have been developed by scholars such as Janken Myrdal and Göran Bäärnhielm, who have identified a number of critical points, namely: 1) the time between miracle and report; 2) witness testimonies correcting the stories and adding more information; 3) the knowledge that over-dramatised stories could create a bad reputation for a cult; 4) the lack of unlikely stories even after the death of the holy person; 5) the lack of coherence with biblical stories; 6) the lack of coherence with other saint legends; and finally 7) considerable information on details regarding the context, such as horses, stables and the environment.¹² Myrdal and Bäärnhielm conclude that the Swedish miracles are reliable as sources of information for studies concerning what is related in them.¹³

There is little specific research on medieval religious practices. Considerable research has been done on medieval miracles, but this has had little or no interest in religiosity, often focusing rather on other aspects of miracles, such as medicine and canon law. The aim of this study is to contribute a religious perspective on miracle stories. Emphasising the core of these stories – the religious aspect – is, however, an approach much less frequently used in research. Among those who have done so are Ronald C. Finucane, in his *Miracles and Pilgrims* (1977), which analyses the spread of miracle cults in medieval England, and his *The Rescue of Innocents* (2000), in which children and deaths of children are examined; and André Vauchez in his *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du moyen âge* (1981), which has become something of a manual for quantitative analysis of miracle stories and their narrative structures. Other researchers working with similar approaches are Christian Krötzel in “Parent-Child Relations in Medieval Scandinavia According to Scandinavian Miracle Collections” (1989), which focuses on parental behaviour in miracle stories; Sari Katajala-Peltomaa’s *Gender, Miracles and Daily Life* (2009), in which she describes everyday phenomena in European miracle collections; Anders Fröjmark’s *Mirakler och helgonkult* (1992), which examines late medieval Scandinavian miracle cults, and “Childbirth Miracles in Swedish Miracle Collections” (2012) in which the phenomenon of stillborn children is examined; Janken Myrdal and Göran Bäärnhielm’s *Kvinnor, barn och fester i medeltida mirakelberättelser* (1994), which not only analyses medieval miracle stories as historical sources, but also lists all extant medieval Swedish miracle stories; and my own study, *The Prayer Life of Peasant Communities in Late Medieval Sweden* (Aldrin 2011), which

¹² Myrdal & Bäärnhielm 1994, 119–124.

¹³ Myrdal & Bäärnhielm 1994, 119–124; cf. Aldrin 2011, 136–142.

concentrates on practices of lay prayer, should also be mentioned in this group of studies.

Two aspects will be highlighted: firstly the initial reactions and responses of grief, and secondly the ways in which prayer was used as a religious coping strategy. Since miracle stories only tell of successful miracles, the first aspect will investigate the coming of death into the family regardless of a miraculous outcome, and the second aspect will focus on the exit of death through the prayers of the parents.

Enter Death: The Grieving Parent

Since the Middle Ages, many theories of bereavement have evolved which aid the understanding of sorrow and coping among parents. The perhaps most commonly cited bereavement theory is that of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) – the five stages of grief – where dying patients were coping and realising that they were going to die. This theory has been much criticised, especially as it has been popularly used as a general pattern for grieving regardless of situation. Instead, it seems that parental grief over a child's death is different to the realisation of one's own immediate death and grief for adults.¹⁴

In this section, I will examine the initial reactions of bereaved parents in the medieval material. What is perhaps the most fruitful modern theory of bereavement has been outlined by Catherine M. Sanders (1998) and further developed by Kay Talbot (2002). It can be described as the five phases of bereavement, and focuses explicitly on parental grief over the death of a child. The five phases are: phase one, shock; phase two, awareness of loss; phase three, conservation; phase four, healing; and the fifth and final phase, renewal.¹⁵ In the case of the medieval miracle stories, it is plausible to assume that they all belong to phase one – shock – which “usually passes into the next phase when rituals of death are over and constricted emotions begin to release and overflow”, since the time of bereavement is short in the miracle stories and, before the child is buried, the miracle has been received and death is driven off.¹⁶

According to Sanders and Talbot, the first phase usually lasts until after the burial, when parents can release their pent up feelings of loss and thereby move on to the second phase of bereavement, the awareness of loss.¹⁷ Sanders presents both characteristics and symptoms of this first phase, several of which are seen in the miracle stories.

Notwithstanding the great time difference between the contemporary theory and the miracle stories, Sanders' theory can still shed some light on the understanding

¹⁴ Calderwood 2011.

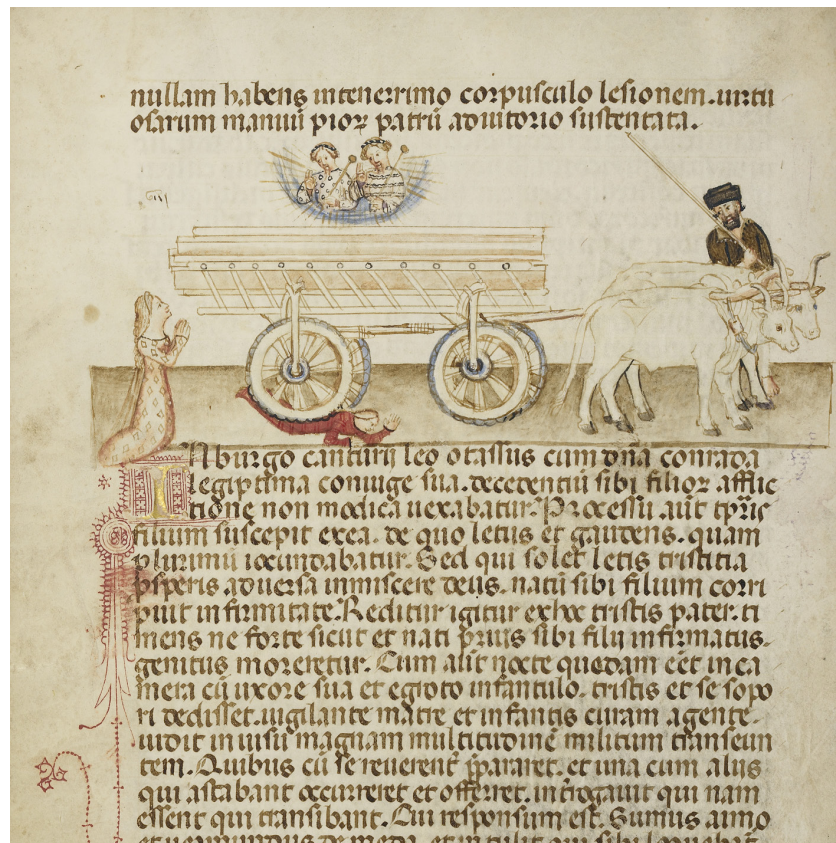
¹⁵ Talbot 2002, 66.

¹⁶ Talbot 2002, 66.

¹⁷ Sanders 1998; summarised in Talbot 2002, 66.

and interpretation of parental grief in these medieval narratives. It is possible to see a correlation between psychological behaviour both prior to and during bereavement, presuming that the ways in which one acted previously have set the patterns for the ways in which grief is expressed.¹⁸ Since Sanders' bereavement theory does not focus on cultural behaviour as much as on physical and psychological behaviour, it will be used here as a means to analyse bereavement behaviour in medieval miracle stories.

The examples examined in this section provide information about actions and reactions beyond simple information on the discovery of a dead child and the parents praying for a miracle which subsequently happened. Out of the 37 miracle stories on dying or dead children examined, 12 stories (5 Birgitta, 0 Nicolaus Hermanni, 7 Katarina) provide information regarding the discovery, 17 (5 Birgitta, 3 Nicolaus Hermanni, 9 Katarina) describe parental emotions when they realise that their child is dying or dead, and 14 (1 Birgitta, 4 Nicolaus Hermanni, 9 Katarina) relate the preparation of the corpse. First, the discovery itself will be examined.¹⁹



Picture 1. This image shows a posthumous miracle by two Italian saints, Aimo and his brother Vermando. The girl Allegranza was accidentally crushed under carriage wheels, but her mother prayed for the intervention of the saints, and she was saved.

¹⁸ Cf. Riley et al. 2007; Schwab 1996.

¹⁹ Childbirth miracles are included in the material, but are not examined further since they have already been examined recently in Fröjmark 2012.

Discoveries of Death

All miracle stories begin with a description of the reason why a miracle was prayed for. In the case of dead or dying children, this description includes not only the sequence of events that ultimately led to the death, but sometimes also information on when the parents become aware of this. The stories can be organised into two strands, where the first concerns is a child who becomes ill and gradually becomes worse until the child has died, while the second is some extreme and sudden situation in which the child dies without previous illness. In the case of gradual death, the parents are described as being close to the dying child, and their reactions to when this transfer from life to death occurs will be examined here. In contrast, the parents were not always present when death occurred suddenly. Instead they discovered the child when it was already dead, or when they were told of it by someone else who was present at the child's death.

An example of a powerful reaction when a child was discovered can be found in a miracle of the Blessed Katarina of Vadstena from 1472, in which a child of eighteen months disappeared and the grandfather and mother were searching for it. The child was later discovered drowned in a well, stuck upside down:²⁰

With the aid of the mother, he dragged the boy out, laid him on his mother's knee and rolled him to and fro in order to see if he could find life in him, but it could not be found, since the child was all cold and stiff.²¹

In this story, the mother and the grandfather tried to discern whether or not the child was dead by rolling him over the mother's legs, but the child gave no sign of life. Rolling the child also occurs in other similar miracle stories of dead children as a way of trying to bring the child back to life.

Of the five senses – hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste – three senses are represented in the miracle stories – hearing, sight and touch – as these would have been the only actual senses used in the discovery of a newly deceased person. The most common way to determine the death of a child in the stories is by sight, in 9 out of 11 miracles which tell of the discovery (out of the total 37 miracles examined). This is exemplified in a miracle story of the Blessed Katarina of Vadstena from 1471, where a father and his child (no age is given) were coming back from doing business when the horses bolted.²² The boy was cast out of the wagon and a sack of malt fell onto him, crushing him to death. The father is described as being “half dead in pain at seeing his son”,²³ and the boy lay dead for three hours. The

20 Lundén (ed.) 1981, fascimile 74 (Miracle #40).

21 In Latin: “[...] *quem mediante matris adiutorio ipse extraxit et in sinu matris ponens voluit et reuoluit / ut videret si vitam in eo inuenire posset / sed non est inuenta / quia omnino frigidus et rigidus erat.*”

22 Collijn (ed.) 1942–1946, 96–97 (Miracle #11).

23 Ibid., 96. In Latin: “*Pater vero prefati pueri hec videns quasi semimortuus pre dolore [...].*”

parents are described as first seeing that the child was dead or dying, and then their reactions came. Still, the example cited above of the child being rolled to and fro is not of this kind, illustrating instead proof of death made through touch and the temperature of the child.

The two kinds of death discoveries differ in the sense of the emotional preparation for the realisation that the child is dead. When death approaches gradually, the parents will have some time to consider what is about to happen, although this is not seen as an emotional protection by the parent. When death is sudden, the parents are unprepared for it and their reactions differ from those of parents whose realisation is gradual. When the parents have realised that their child is dead, the life-long existence of being a bereaved parent begins.

Emotional Responses

In many of the miracle stories, the discoveries are directly followed by the emotional responses of the parents. Although the emotions of being bereaved as a parent are the same regardless of time and culture, the ways in which they are expressed are culturally encoded. In Western European medieval miracle studies, it is common to have a gender-coded grief pattern, where men and women express their emotions differently.²⁴ This pattern has been interpreted as resulting from the differing roles men and women had in medieval society, where men had more outward, society-focused activity than women, who had more inward, family-focused activity. This generalisation has, however, been questioned. In the Icelandic sagas, for example, bereaved fathers often show strong emotions that may indicate strong links between father and child.²⁵ In Scandinavian miracles, it has also previously been concluded that the gender-specific roles found on the continent do not apply to the Nordic region.²⁶

²⁴ Lansing 2008; Finucane 2000, 151–158; Houlbrooke 1998.

²⁵ Katajala-Peltomaa 2013; Jørgensen Itnyre 1996.

²⁶ Krötzl 1989.



Picture 2. In the Biblical story (Gen. 21:1–20), Hagar, Abraham's concubine, and their son Ishmael were banished into the wilderness at the insistence of Abraham's wife. As they ran out of water, Hagar left Ishmael under a bush as she could not watch him die. She started to cry in desperation, but God sent her relief in the form of an angel and helping her find a well.

Over half of the miracle stories examined, 17 of the 37 (5 Birgitta, 3 Nicolaus Hermanni, 9 Katarina), describe the emotions of the bereaved parents. In the miracle stories not describing any particular emotional response, the only reaction by the parents to the death of their child is to pray to a particular saint. Still, this response is omitted in this paper since it provides little new for the investigation – all such stories involve someone praying for a miracle and the miracle itself.

Perhaps the most peculiar emotional response from a modern point of view is the commonly occurring custom of leaving a dead child for a couple of hours in order for it to come back to life – or to determine that it really is dead. In almost all the miracle stories mentioning this, the child is described as physically dead; that is, not moving, stiff, cold, with a bluish skin tone, etc. In one miracle story of the Blessed Katarina of Vadstena from 1471, however, the same description is given of a girl of seven, who was lying still, but foaming at the mouth for the whole period

of time and whose skin colour seemed blue.²⁷ She lay like this for an hour, during which everyone seeing her considered her dead. Still, in all these examples with the child lying as if dead for a couple of hours without the parents touching it, the child returned to life only after a miracle.

In the miracles examined, both mothers and fathers wept for their dead children, contrary to what has been argued for Continental and British miracle stories.²⁸ Fathers were allowed to express their grief in tears and by showing great pain in the same way as mothers, without being criticised for this by the redactors of the miracle collections. It seems that public grief was natural and common to both sexes in medieval Sweden and that a strong emotional response by the parents emphasises the greatness of the divine intervention in the form of the miracle.

In a story of the Blessed Katarina of Vadstena from 1441, a visiting Carmelite monk visited the house of a family whose loss of their three-year-old daughter shows a particularly good example of this gender-neutral weeping.²⁹ The monk found both parents and their friends in grief, weeping and lamenting, and when he asked them the reason for their sorrow he was told that they wept for their daughter who had been running just a moment ago before she was killed in an accident:³⁰

While she was indeed, together with her husband and other friends, grieving and weeping for the death of their beloved, Porse entered [...] asking the cause of such great sorrow. The aforementioned wife said: "We mourn for this daughter of ours, who an hour ago killed herself by playing with and using a knife".³¹

Another example of similar responses can be found in the miracle of the same Blessed Katarina of Vadstena that occurred in 1441, when a son of eighteen months had died.³² The boy had swallowed a large ear of wheat and was tormented by it for five weeks before ceasing to show signs of life. The story relates that the father and the mother saw this and "grieved more than anyone can imagine" (ibid, 85).³³

In one of the miracle stories, the emotions of a parent are vividly presented, describing not only the grief and tears but also how the mother wanted to come physically into contact with the deceased. The example comes from a miracle by the Blessed Katarina of Vadstena from 1472, where a three-year-old girl fell out of a window and died from the fall, and was found by the city guard and brought to

27 Collijn (ed.) 1942–1946, 99–100 (Miracle #30). This presentation comes from two reports of the same miracle (one recording the miracle and one later complementary recording).

28 Gertsman 2001.

29 Collijn (ed.) 1942–1946, 122–123 (Miracle #8).

30 Ibid., 122–123.

31 "*Ipsa vera cum marito suo et alijs amicis mortem eius amare dolente et lugente, superuenit quidam Porse [...] querens causam tante tristicie. Cui prefata mulier dixit: 'Lugemus hic filiam nostram, que hic ante vnam horam iocando et ludendo vno cultello seipsam interfecit.'*"

32 Lundén (ed.) 1981, facsimiles 84–85 (Miracle #55).

33 In Latin: "*Pater et mater hec videntes et plusquam credi potest con gementes.*"

the mother.³⁴ When the mother realised that her daughter was dead, she did not leave the body for burial preparations for several hours and instead tried to bring her daughter back to life again.³⁵

The mother was indescribably upset when she saw her daughter dead and pitifully covered with blood. For almost three hours, she embraced, caressed and stroked her, and rolled her back and forth; still, the spirit, which had burst away, by no means returned to the body it was separated from. She therefore directed that the corpse be carried to a private room, according to the custom.³⁶

This is often not the case in the other miracle stories, it being more common for dead children to be laid out to rest in either the common room or a separate room after it has died as described in the miracle. It seems that the emotions of the parents, if they are described, are mostly aimed at the living and the divine. One should, however, not draw the conclusion that no such emotions occurred at all – as this example effectively demonstrates.

The most obvious emotional reaction in all miracle stories is that of hoping for a miracle – which eventually did occur – which illustrates the religious coping involved in the medieval context. The ability of God to create miracles exists in these stories and was considered to be something natural and accepted within the context of religion in the medieval period. Still, these miracle stories give an unrepresentative image of bereavement since the vast majority of dead children did not come to life again through a miracle, only miraculous events being preserved for analysis. In the stories, not all those present consider the option of divine miraculous intervention. Often it is only one or two people who begin to pray to a particular saint for a miracle or, as in one of the stories, an external visitor mentions the possibility and hope for a miracle arises. The emotional responses in the miracle stories are often direct and impulsive, such as efforts to bring the child back to life through physical activities including rolling it to and fro – although it does not seem possible to regain life at all. Parents also cried a great deal in the stories, while some parents seem paralysed in their grief so that others needed to continue the procedures of preparing the deceased or praying to a saint.

Preparation of the Dead for Burial

The actions immediately after the moment of death were also part of the preparations for the burial of the dead, when it is realised that the person is really dead and

34 Lundén (ed.) 1981, facsimiles 76–77 (Miracle #43).

35 Ibid., facsimiles 76–77.

36 “*Mater vero turbata inestimabiliter filiam videns mortuam et sanguine miserabiliter circumfusam amplectitur tractat palpat voluit et reuoluit spacio fere trium horarum Verumptamen spiritus a corpore separatus minime reuertitur Ideo percepit cadauer in domum priuatam deportari ut moris est.*”

that the corpse needs to be made ready for burial.³⁷ Religious coping plays an important part here since the rite of passage of burial is an important step between the living and the dead. The deceased joins the dead and is part of memory, and in the medieval Christian context also becomes a part of the afterlife (where it was perfectly normal to communicate with the deceased through prayer).

In nearly half of the miracle stories, 14 of the 37 (1 Birgitta, 4 Nicolaus Hermanni, 9 Katarina), preparations for the burial had already begun when one or both of the parents began to pray for a miracle. All of these mention the immediate preparation or how the corpse was laid out in the house before the actual burial. None of the miracles tell of divine intervention during or after the burial. It is as if the miracle could only occur during the first days after death – indeed, corpses were buried quite quickly in the medieval period.

The most common preparation of the deceased in the miracle stories (12 of 14) was to lay the child out either on the floor or on a bench in a separate room. In cases where there seems to be a possibility for the child to return to life as previously mentioned, there is apparently a pattern of keeping the child aside. In contrast, in only five of these miracle stories is the reader told of more specific and final preparation of the deceased (where death is certain). In the miracle story cited above about the Blessed Katarina of Vadstena and the girl who fell out of the window, the reader is told that the mother carried the corpse of her daughter to a separate room, according to custom, that this house was high and had several rooms since one could be spared for the deceased.³⁸ Similar to this positioning of the corpse is the miracle of the Blessed Katarina of Vadstena, occurring sometime between 1416–1455 or 1470–1477, which concerns another girl dying of illness when her father was away on a long journey.³⁹ When the father returned, he went into the room where the deceased child was placed on a bier. He told the others in the household that they were not allowed to touch the corpse and he then began to pray for a miracle. In this story, the corpse was being prepared for burial, hence the touching of the corpse, but the reader is not told how this was done except for placing the dead girl on a bier in a separate room. The practice of laying corpses on biers also occurs in a previously cited miracle story of the same Blessed Katarina of Vadstena where a monk visited a household and found the family grieving and lamenting.⁴⁰ The monk went to the bier where the dead girl lay and mentioned the possibility of a miracle.

37 For studies on burials in medieval Sweden, see Mejsholm 2009; Nilsson 2009; Nilsson 1989.

38 Lundén (ed.) 1981, facsimiles 76–77 (Miracle #43).

39 Lundén (ed.) 1981, facsimiles 55–56 (Miracle #9).

40 Collijn (ed.) 1942–1946, 122–123 (Miracle #8).



Picture 3. Hannibal Gustav Wrangel af Salmis (1641–1643), the firstborn of Count Carl Gustaf Wrangel af Salmis and Anna Margareta von Haugwitz, died at the age of 16 months in Germany. His distraught parents had a posthumous portrait painted of their son on his *lit de parade*.

Only two miracle stories specifically reveal more about the preparation of the deceased other than the positioning of the corpse. In a story of the Blessed Bishop Nicolaus Hermanni of Linköping from 1405, a three-year-old boy died of the plague.⁴¹ While he lay dying, the relatives read and said prayers for his soul, and after the death his father made the sign of the cross over the boy and said five Paternosters and Hail Marys “as for the dead” (*pro defuncto*).⁴² Whilst saying this, the father began to consider the possibility of a miracle, according to the recorder of the story. Here the reader is told of prayer practices for a dying child and for the newly deceased. The story also tells of the two standard prayers of medieval religiosity – the Paternoster and the Hail Mary recited five times over. (The third standard text, the Creed, was not used here.) The father thought of something greater while saying these prayers and was rewarded for his faith:⁴³

His father Olov marked the boy with the sign of the cross and read five Paternosters and Hail Marys as for the dead. But while he was praying, it came to his mind that he would make a promise on his behalf to master Nicolas's tomb if he could be given his life back. And after a short while, the father and the mother discovered a small red blush on his cheeks and eyelids, and finally his limbs began to move, he began to

41 Schück (ed.) 1873–1895, 347–348 (Miracle #5).

42 Ibid, 347.

43 Ibid, 347–348.

breathe, opened his eyes, came back to life and is living healthy and sound today, the day of the apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul in the year 1411.⁴⁴

It was customary in the medieval period to say these standard prayers and consider various mental themes, such as the grief of the Blessed Virgin Mary or of the healing abilities of particular saints.⁴⁵ The second miracle comes from the Blessed Katarina of Vadstena in 1472, where a ten-year-old boy died when a haystack and a ladder fell onto him.⁴⁶ The boy's brother and mother saw this, and the brother wanted to take the dead brother away for burial preparations immediately. Those preparations were described as shrouding the body and then burying him.

The Process of Grief

The first phase in Sanders' bereavement scheme can be traced in the miracle stories although it is necessary to keep in mind that the medieval context is different from today in terms of gestures and emotional expressions. Sanders' system allows, however, expressions of bereavement to be categorised and analysed as part of a grieving process, which enhances the authenticity of these stories.⁴⁷

Of the general characteristics of the first phase, disbelief and confusion particularly can be found expressed in the miracle stories.⁴⁸ Disbelief emerges in the perception that the death is not real and that the child is still somehow alive – striking examples of this are the stories of the mother who refuses to leave her dead daughter, as well as the mother and father who try to bring their child back to life by rolling him to and fro, even though he has already been declared dead. Confusion occurs where the bereaved parent realises that the world will be very different without the deceased – this is especially the case with the widow who lost both her children. Other characteristics such as restlessness, feelings of unreality, regression and helplessness, and finally a state of alarm cannot be found explicitly in these miracle stories. One should, however, bear in mind that the accounts of these events were recorded after the miraculous intervention and in the light of God's ability to break through this world's harsh realities.

44 *"Pater vero predictus Olauus incepit puerum signo crucis signare et legit quinque pater noster et ave maria pro defuncto, sub qua lectura uenit ei in mentem, ut uotum ad sepulchrum domini Nicholai pro eo faceret, si vitam suam recuperare posset. Et modico interuallo facto deprehenderunt idem pater et mater paruum unum ruborem in maxillis defuncti apparere et in palpebris suis, et tandem cepit primo moueri in membris et demum spiritum ducere et demum oculos aperire et vitam consequi et uiuit hodie sanus et incolumis, id est die apostolorum Petri et Pauli de anno domini M CD XI."*

45 Aldrin 2011, 59–64.

46 Lundén (ed.) 1981, facsimiles 77–78 (Miracle #44).

47 Sanders 1998; Talbot 2002, 66.

48 Talbot 2002, 60.

Of the physical symptoms described by Sanders, only one – weeping – can be found in the miracle stories. There is no indication of dryness of the mouth, the need for sighing, loss of muscular control, uncontrolled trembling, startled responses, sleep disturbance or loss of appetite. It may be that the only reason for this is that the miracles occur before these physical symptoms begin to occur, and moreover that the parents did not find it necessary to include information about these things. The psychological symptoms are perhaps the most difficult to discern in these miracle stories. It can be argued that both egocentric phenomena and preoccupation of thoughts with the deceased occur, but these are also part of describing the act of becoming bereaved. Sanders' model of interpretation⁴⁹ is a weak instrument of analysis for medieval miracle stories, but it still seems to be the most useful of the bereavement theories in respect to these stories and the analysis of parents in grief.

This theory suggests the conclusion that the parents are affected by the dreadful events not only physically but also psychologically – trying to survive and respond to harsh events. Talbot argues that losing a child is different to other bereavement experiences as it alters so much for the parent in terms of identity, emotions and thoughts of the future.⁵⁰ A dead child never leaves the bereaved parent in terms of psychology, but continues to be an important part of his or her life.⁵¹

The Miracle Story as Narrative Coping

An effective means of psychological survival for the parents is to create narratives of what happened and about the deceased child, thereby creating a memory for coping.⁵² Miracle stories can, in my view, be seen as pertaining to extreme situations – narratives of escaping bereavement by a hair's breadth. The event that caused the miracle to happen was remembered by the parents for their entire lives – even as it would have been today, or any other time. Miracle stories are, in this sense, not only evidence of a particular saint's power and God's ability to heal, but are also reconstructions of tragedies to aid parents in their recovery from the shock.

Grief and Gender

Research on medieval miracle stories from Central Europe, Italy and the British Isles would suggest that the stories differ from Swedish ones in one particular respect – that of gender differences in emotional expressions of bereavement.

49 Sanders 1998; Talbot 2002, 66.

50 Talbot 2002, 1–21.

51 Talbot 2002, 169–181.

52 Gerrish & Bailey 2012; Arnold et al. 2007.

Gender differences are present in forms such as how emotions are expressed and, when these expressions differ from the expected gender roles, the person is mocked in British and Continental miracle stories.⁵³ This phenomenon of gender-specific expressions of bereavement or criticism of such behaviour is non-existent in my material. Both men and women weep publicly and often act together in order to take care of the deceased or pray to a particular saint. It seems that bereavement took different forms in medieval Sweden from other parts of Europe.

Why this is so can possibly be explained through modern gender studies on parental bereavement. Correlations have been found between gender and grief, and between how a person reacted and coped with extreme situations before the death of a child.⁵⁴ Gendered behaviour by the parent in the ways in which the father and mother are supposed to behave in a normal situation – where the mother is supposed to be more emotional in her expressions than the father – have consequences for how the process of bereavement is expressed emotionally.⁵⁵ If these correlations were also true for the medieval period, as Katajala-Peltomaa has indicated in line with my own analysis,⁵⁶ one can draw the conclusion that the gender roles of parents differed between parents in Scandinavia, where both men and women showed strong emotions, and the British Isles and Continental Europe where men adopted a less emotionally expressive behaviour than women.

Exit Death: The Praying Parent

In this section, I will examine the ways in which these bereaved parents used their religiosity in terms of prayer to cope with the situation of loss. The key point in understanding medieval miracle stories is the fact that a miracle occurs and that God thereby acts directly in the world. Nonetheless, many studies of medieval miracles have focused instead on illness, behaviour and the statistics of the actors in these stories. But the very reason why these miracle stories were recorded and used in the promotion of presumed saints was religious. Miracles happened only to a few, and one could never know whether God wanted to perform a miracle or not, regardless of the severity of the situation and the depth of grief. This has always been one of the mysteries of Christianity, and even Jesus Christ himself did not cure all illness and did not revoke death for everyone. The reason for this cannot be understood in terms of theology; it must simply be accepted that it is beyond human capacity to know how God's reasons.

⁵³ Finucane 2000, 151–158.

⁵⁴ Riley et al. 2007; Schwab 1996.

⁵⁵ Riley et al. 2007; Schwab 1996.

⁵⁶ Katajala-Peltomaa 2013.

God and Saints as Healers

The prime example of healing throughout the history of Christianity has been God the Father himself performing miracles through his son Jesus Christ – healings often referred to and viewed as role models. In the New Testament, readers are told of two miracles Jesus performed for dying children and their parents. The first miracle can be found in Mark 5:21–43, where the twelve-year-old daughter of the Synagogue leader Jairus was brought back to life.⁵⁷ The second miracle can be found in Luke 7:11–17, where the only son of a widow from Nain had died and was about to be carried away when Jesus passed the widow.⁵⁸ Both stories tell of bereaved persons and Jesus asked the dead children to stand up – both were lying down when he spoke to them – and he then ensured that these resurrected children were helped in appropriate ways. The girl was given food and the boy was given back to his mother. Still, these were the only two miracles of this kind that Jesus performed. He must have seen a great many more dead and dying children, although he also brought the adult Lazarus back from his grave (John 11:1–44).

These stories of Jesus' ability to heal must have been known to lay people, as the most powerful stories of God's ability to act and heal the sick and the dead. The power of God as healer is recalled in the miracle stories, as well as God's power to perform miracles. In the miracles analysed in this paper, however, no references to these stories are made – either explicitly, such as recalling God's actions in these cases and the possibility of repeating these miracles, or implicitly through the imitation of these miracles in terms of *modus operandi* or using the same phrases. This gives authenticity to the stories since it is relatively easy to mimic Biblical miracles in miracle collections – something common to European collections, but almost non-existent in Scandinavian ones. In the anatomy of a miracle story, someone needs to pray to a saint or God, asking for a miracle, this prayer usually including some kind of offering in return for the miracle such as a votive gift to the shrine of the saint which has to be fulfilled once the miracle has occurred. Otherwise the illness could return.

Parents in Prayer

In all the miracle stories analysed here, parents or someone related to the dying or dead child, prayed to the presumed saint. The majority of the 37 stories say only that the parents prayed for the dead or dying and that the miracle took place, whereas 11 (1 Birgitta, 2 Nicolaus Hermanni, 8 Katarina) explain more specifically how this

57 Synopsis: Jesus asks why they are all crying and weeping, and tells the father that the girl is just sleeping, although Jairus' servants have said that the daughter has died (she is dying when Jairus asks Jesus for help) and calls for her to awaken again, with the famous words *talitha kum* ("little girl, get up"). The girl wakes up and Jesus asks for food for her.

58 Synopsis: Jesus tells the widow not to cry, touches the bier, and then tells the boy to stand up. The boy does so and begins to speak. Jesus then gives the boy back to his mother.

prayer was performed. The stories commonly describe the emotional expressions and gestures of the bereaved parent when he or she prayed (17 miracles in total: 5 Birgitta, 2 Nicolaus Hermanni, 10 Katarina). These emotions were often either submissive (humbleness) or lachrymose.

A typical example of how prayer was expressed can be found in a miracle story of Saint Birgitta of Sweden from somewhere between 1374 and 1390, where two children fell from their widowed mother's arms into a stream and could not be found.⁵⁹ The children were later discovered safe in the water, described "as if they have been resting on a bed of flowers". In the miracle story, the bereaved widow, having realised that she was about to lose her only children, cried to the saint with many tears and began to pray. The content of the prayer itself, in which the widow submitted herself in sorrow to the miraculous powers of God through Saint Birgitta of Sweden, was then summarised for the reader:⁶⁰

It was about noon, when the woman, who saw that she was bereft of her children and had lost the comforts and hopes of her widowhood, called sobbing to the lady Birgitta that she – this honourable widow who for more than thirty years, long before her husband's death, with his consent had promised to live in chastity, who had lived a commendable life and in truth already seems to be inseparably united with her heavenly groom – that she ought to think it worthy to come to the aid of the abandoned and miserable widow, who promised to make a pilgrimage with the children to Vadstena if she could take them alive from the whirlpools of the water. She then wiped the tears away and saw that [...].⁶¹

Another quite common way of describing prayer is to present the thoughts of the bereaved parent when he or she began to think of the possibility of miraculous intervention. In the miracle story of the Blessed Bishop Nicolaus Hermanni of Linköping cited above, where a boy was dying and the parents prayed the standard sequence of Paternosters and Hail Marys, the father was described as thinking in terms of a miracle while praying for his boy as a dead person.⁶² The father then made a vow to visit the late bishop's tomb, whereupon the boy came to life again. The way in which the praying father used his mind to voice another prayer whilst still reciting a standard prayer was something common and recommended in the Middle Ages.⁶³ The fact that the father mentioned this change in his thought illustrates his acceptance of doing so, and the recorder of the miracle made no remark concerning this.

59 Collijn (ed.) 1924–1931, 125 (Miracle #30, Series "B").

60 Ibid, 125.

61 *"Et hora erat quasi sexta, cernens mulier se liberis exorbatam spemque consolationem viduitatis sue perijisse, dolorosis singultibus dominam Brigidam iuvocabat, vt illa venerabilis vidua, que triginta annis et eo amplius diu ante mortem mariti illo consenciente castitatem seruare vouerat et laudabiliter vixerat et celesto sponso iam inseparabiliter coniuncta vere creditur, desolate et misere vidue succurrere dignaretur, vouens se cum paruulis ad Wastenam peregre profecturam, si eos viuos de gurgitibus aquarum recipere posset. Deinde extergens lacrimas ab oculis vidit [...]."*

62 Schück (ed.) 1873–1895, 347–348 (Miracle #5).

63 Aldrin 2011, 59–64.

Two miracle stories of the Blessed Nicholas Hermanni discuss lot casting, a particular way to discern to whom to address a prayer for a miraculous intervention.⁶⁴ Lots were cast in a particular order to determine whom God wished to be the addressee for prayer.⁶⁵ When, as in this miracle story, the Blessed Bishop Nicolaus Hermanni of Linköping was selected by the lots, those at the house of the deceased began to pray to him and the miracle occurred. The process of lot casting is described by the miracle compiler as being according to the customs of the people, but with no remark on whether it was unacceptable behaviour and, accordingly, whether this was the way to discern the will of God. Lot casting was common in medieval Sweden and considered to be something good and in opposition to evil, since God's will was requested rather than the Devil's power.⁶⁶

In all the miracle stories discussed here, no priests were present when the prayer for the miracle was made,⁶⁷ which is thus something which lay people did for themselves and which they were respected for and trusted to do.⁶⁸ In fact, nowhere in the entire miracle material of late medieval Sweden are there any remarks made that the prayer was inappropriate because of the lack of a priest,⁶⁹ suggesting that lay people in the Middle Ages, at least in Sweden, were not as dependent on the clergy for their religious practices as had been previously thought. Instead, bereaved parents had the opportunity to create their own prayers and to construct business-like agreements with presumed saints in return for a miracle.



Picture 4. After their son had fallen seriously ill, Leone Otasso and his wife presented the boy to Saints Aimo and Vermando so that he would be cured. This happened miraculously by divine intervention.

64 Schück (ed.) 1873–1895, 384–386 (Miracles #56, #58).

65 Aldrin 2011, 112–118; Fröjmark 1993, 98; Krötzl 2012.

66 Aldrin 2011, 112–118.

67 See also, Aldrin 2011, 109–144.

68 See also Aldrin 2011, 109–144; Källström 2011, 305–309.

69 See also Aldrin 2011, 109–144.

The Miracle

When the miracle occurred, God had acted in that particular situation by bringing the child back to life. This is the epicentre of the miracle story narrative – where God's healing powers are proved and manifested. Although the miracle itself is not focused on in this paper, it is necessary to say something about what came after the prayer – the miracle itself and its aftermath. Unlike the biblical miracles and the ways in which such miracles occur, the miracles in the medieval stories are often a process rather than an instant healing. The stories often graphically relate how the child came to life again, limb by limb, and was later examined to show no vestiges of the illness or accident that led to death or, in the case of infants, that they instantly began to suckle again.

After the miracle had occurred, the votive promise made by the parents, often a visit or a gift to the tomb of the presumed saint, was fulfilled. A common feature of medieval miracle stories is that some did not fulfil their promises to the saint and were punished with even fiercer pains than before. However, in the case of bereaved parents in Swedish miracles, no parent is said not to have fulfilled the promise – perhaps they did not wish to risk their children's health. The miracles often also include specific information about witnesses such as names, villages and occupations in order to control the facts of the miracle.

Religious Coping through Prayer

Little is related in the miracle stories of the actual prayer process in relation to the bereavement process, which is more often described in these stories. A glimpse of ordinary death preparation is given – of how bereaved parents prepared their dead child for the final rites of passage, the burial. The stories say little of clerical intervention and activity in this preparation, it being the parents and relatives themselves who prepare the dead and the dying. All of the stories also include prayer, sometimes not only to a particular saint for a miracle, but also standard prayers that were used throughout the life of a lay person in the Middle Ages. Prayer surrounded both the living and the dead in the process of dying.⁷⁰ No evidence is found for any use of the *ars moriendi* procedures for a dying person, where he prepares himself spiritually to enter heaven.⁷¹ The dying children do not prepare themselves for their death; their parents react to their deaths through praying for a miracle.

If these miracle stories provide a glimpse of ordinary death preparations for deceased children, then much of what has previously been assumed regarding the use of *ars moriendi* procedures and extreme unction needs to be reconsidered.

⁷⁰ Aldrin 2011, 109–144.

⁷¹ For research on death preparation and extreme unction in medieval Sweden, see Fallberg Sundmark 2008.

Although religion provided ways to interpret and understand the world and the difficulties in life, none of the miracle stories tell of parents interpreting the death of their child in terms of religion. They all knew, or were told of, the possibility of praying to God for a miracle, but they did not accuse God or claim that He had taken away the life of the child. All deaths were described as natural facts, due to natural causes such as illness or fatal accidents. The parents were not complaining to God that the lives of their children were all too short, or that they were bereaved unjustly.

The religious context provides a strong framework of coping for the bereaved parents into which to place themselves and their dead children. They knew what had happened to their dead children and what was required of them to do – both in the short term (burial) and the long term (life as a bereaved person). Still, none of this took away the strong emotions of bereavement and nothing in the miracle stories tells of denial or neglecting such emotions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to examine religious coping among parents in the Middle Ages through the use of Swedish miracle stories. Two aspects have been highlighted, that of bereavement expressions and that of coping through prayer.

We can now say of the first aspect, bereavement, that two different approaches have been found regarding the discoveries of death, depending on the speed of the events that led to the death of the child. When death occurred gradually, the reactions of the parents were less emotionally expressive than when death was sudden. The most usual way to deal with the deceased was to place the child in a separate room if available or on a bier, but it was also normal to leave the deceased for a couple of hours in order for him or her to recover from death through a miracle.

Catherine M. Sanders' and Kay Talbot's studies on parental bereavement in modern times have been used to analyse the physical and psychological aspects of the responses of the parents in the miracle stories. In this analysis, it has proved complicated to use a modern theory for the medieval period for bereavement, but several of the reactions described in Sanders' first phase of bereavement – shock – apply to the parents in the miracle story, such as disbelief in the reality of the death and confusion about how to continue after the realisation of bereavement. Another approach to bereavement and miracle stories can be found in the use of narratives as a psychological aid for the bereaved. Miracle stories fit this approach well, and can thus be understood as narratives constructed by the parents to understand and find strength in the face of what has happened – the hair's-breadth encounter with death.



Picture 5. Many worshippers expressed their gratitude to Saints Aimo and Vermando for their many miracles.

The parents' emotional reactions are described in a few miracle stories as strong and expressive, and both men and women grieve in similar ways. This situation contrasts with research on British and Continental European miracle stories and can be interpreted through a connection between emotional reaction to extreme situations before and after the moment of bereavement. In earlier research, gender differences have been identified which cannot be found in the Swedish miracle stories examined here. This might suggest that gender roles in medieval Sweden (and possibly Scandinavia) differ from those of Continental Europe and the British Isles.

We can now conclude of religious coping through prayer that the second emotional behaviour and gestures of the praying parent are occasionally described in the miracle stories. These stories depict the praying parent as either weeping or submissive towards the addressee of the prayer; that is, to the person revered as a saint. In two such stories, lot casting is described as a way to discern the will of God when the parents cannot decide to whom to address the prayer. The use of lot casting in these miracle stories was considered normal and accepted.

The miraculous recovery is often described as a process whereby life was regained limb by limb. This is, however, not the case for infants who immediately came to life and began to suckle from their mothers' breasts. In the miracle stories, no parent blamed God for the death of a child, considering it to be something that occurred naturally, in term of accidents or stillborn children. What is striking in these stories is the absence of priests providing extreme unction and of the then-popular manuals for dying, such as the *ars moriendi*. Instead, it seems that the laity were able to construct their own prayers, and in the end, receive miracles in the most crucial situation of all to a parent – the death of a child.

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Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife: Readings of the Poem *De Vita Hominis* in Pre-Reformation and Post-Reformation Denmark

Eivor Andersen Oftestad

University of Oslo

This article investigates continuity and change in the economic and spiritual investment in the afterlife in the religious contexts of Denmark before and after the Reformation. The transmission of the late medieval poem De Vita Hominis, first printed in 1514, and then re-edited by Anders Sørensen Vedel in 1571, provides the main material of the investigation.

In the text, the main character had to die a lonely death as a consequence of his wicked life. The intensity in the pre-Reformatory version was due to the experience of lack of intercession in the transgression to afterlife. Changed theological premises meant that the Protestant principle of security of salvation undercut the very heart of the late medieval De Vita Hominis. Intercession was no longer necessary as faith was what saved. This article investigates how the message of the poem was transformed according to the theological rearrangement that followed the new certainty of salvation. One important consequence was a changed notion of memory, and a new function for memorial genres, which Vedel's 1571 edition testifies to.

Introduction

Throughout history, attitudes towards death and the dead change slowly in our western Christian culture. The Reformation in the sixteenth century was however one of those periods when the premises of both theological teachings and religious practice were not necessarily abandoned but transformed, and in which both continuity and change may be traced in attitudes towards death and the dead. The reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) had redefined salvation as by justification by faith, and a new certainty of salvation was preached together with the denial of

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purgatory. Scholars have analysed how the new arrangements for salvation led to new attitudes and practices concerning death and the dead.¹

In the Reformed areas, the doctrine of predestination, in addition to the rejection of purgatory and the efficacy of good works, served to dramatically change funeral practices. To contrast the Catholic practice based on intercession for the dead, the dead in Reformed areas could now be buried in silence without signs of sorrow by their friends and relatives. It was considered improper to grieve over those who were saved.² In Lutheran areas, a moderate show of sorrow was recommended because of the value of natural friendship. Despite redefinitions of the doctrine of salvation, scholars have however argued that the concern and care for one's dead was not removed, but rather transformed.³

This article provides a glimpse of the culture of death in Lutheran Denmark. It compares a pre-Reformation and a post-Reformation Danish version of the poem *De Vita Hominis*, showing how the text testifies not only to new theology but also to transformations of the culture of death. The transmission of the poem offers a perspective on care for one's dead, namely, the religious notion and practice of what can be called investment in the afterlife. What was it to invest in the afterlife according to the late medieval death preparations? And what happened to the idea and practice of investment when the premises changed in accordance with the notion of secure salvation in Protestant theology?

De Vita Hominis can be classified according to the *memento mori* motive that reminded man of inescapable death, and which was expressed through a variety of literal and visual genres.⁴ The poem existed in a late medieval version, but was re-worked by the Danish humanist Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542–1616) in 1571.⁵ Thus, it is a particular and concise example of how a pre-Reformation text on man and death was interpreted and transformed within the religious literature of post-Reformation Denmark. In the preface, Vedel briefly describes the history of the book he had discovered:

“I have found this booklet among some old papist books that were written by Sir Michael [Her Mickel], previous pastor of the Church of St Alban's in Odense, at the request of the blessed Queen Christina, and printed here in Copenhagen, fifty-seven years ago. Anyone who compares the old exemplar with this one can see in this what I have improved in the rhymes and meanings”.⁶

1 Cf. Koslofsky 1999; Marshall 2002; Reinis 2006.

2 Karant-Nunn 2010.

3 Marshall 2002; Oftestad 2015.

4 Daniell 1997, Gertsman 2010.

5 On Anders Sørensen Vedel, see Rørørdam 1904; Akhøj Nielsen 2004; Akhøj Nielsen 2005 and Akhøj Nielsen 2006.

6 “Jeg haffuer fundet dette scrifft/ iblant nogle gamle Papistiske Bøger/ som vaare aff Her Mickel fordøm sogneprest til S. Albani Kircke i Odensee/ screffne effter salige Dronning Kirstines begæring oc Prentet her i Kiøbenhaffn for siu oc halfftradiesindstue Aar forleden. Huad ieg her udi haffuer forbedred / paa Rimene oc meningen/ kand den forfare som uil ligne det gamle Exemplar met dette”, Vedel 1571a, f. Aiiiv–Aiii. It is typical of Vedel to render the history of the book; cf. introduction in Vedel 1575 (cf. Friis-Jensen: 1993) and Vedel 1571b.

Vedel transmits a late medieval text printed by Pouel Ræff in 1514. Ræff, in his turn, described it as one of three texts in a manuscript composed in Danish by an old man called *Sir Michael*, pastor in Odense, in 1496. And, as Ræff mentions, according to Sir Michael's autograph comment in this manuscript, this was done at the request of Queen Christina of Saxony (1461–1521).⁷ We do not know if the text had a Latin model or not.

Vedel's contribution to the Danish language has been widely acknowledged and analysed.⁸ As one of the most influential Danish humanists and historians, Vedel is perhaps most renowned for his translation of *Gesta Danorum* (*Den Danske Krønike*, 1575)⁹ by Saxo Grammaticus (ca. 1150–1220) and his edition of a hundred folksongs (*It Hundrede vdvaalde Danske Viser*, 1591). His transformation of this old text, *De Vita Hominis*, fits into his efforts to refine and renew the Danish language which he carried out in translations and in "improvements" of older texts. However, his edition of *De Vita Hominis* not only testifies to his role as transformer of language but also of religion. Moreover, his theological efforts have been less commented on than his philological contributions.

When we compare his version of *De Vita Hominis* from 1571 with the version from 1514, as he himself recommends us to do, it is noticeable that the changes are significant and can be analysed in terms of the theological project in his own period. As I will show, the ideas about death and the way they were presented, both in matter and form, confirmed each other.

The Pre-Reformatory *De Vita Hominis*

The late medieval text that was printed in 1514 originated from a milieu characterized by the religious awakening and devotion associated with the Dominican order. Sir Michael composed or translated the text of *De Vita Hominis* along with *De Creatione Rerum*, and had edited it together with his translated compilation of a text on the Rosary composed by the Dominican preacher and visionary Alanus de Rupe (1428–1475).¹⁰ De Rupe had worked not only in Paris, Lille and Ghent, but also in Rostock, a place that influenced the religious culture around the Baltic Sea, not least Denmark. When Vedel edited *De Vita Hominis* in 1571, other fragments

7 Cf. a postscriptum after *Expositio pulcherrima super rosario beate Marie virginis*, which was edited together with *De Creatione Rerum* and *De Vita Hominis* in 1514 (LN 175). Ræff prints these texts at the request of the Dominican Hans Bartolomeus of Copenhagen. On Sir Michael, see Paludan 1897; Dahlerup 1998, I, 526–531, Dahlerup, 2010.

8 Akhøj Nielsen 2005; Akhøj Nielsen 2006.

9 Saxo Grammaticus was a Danish historiographer. His *Gesta Danorum*, in 16 volumes, was the first important work on the history of Denmark.

10 On the Rosary in late medieval Danish tradition, Alanus de Rupe and Sir Michael, see Dahlerup 2010, 347–403. The small text collection presented by Sir Michel was described by Paludan (1897) in the nineteenth century as the "swansong" of Nordic Catholicism.

of Sir Michael's texts had also been reused in Danish psalms, as in the psalm on the passion of Christ, "*Nu lader oss tacke Gud*" in the Psalmbook by Hans Thomissøn (1532–1573) from 1569.¹¹ Vedel's transformation and reintroduction of *De Vita Hominis* thus builds on a specific thread of religious devotion in the Danish literary culture.

The text printed in 1514 is presented as a booklet designed to be useful for man and for the salvation of the soul, and treats all stages of human life from birth to death and the Day of Judgement. Each paragraph is introduced by a Danish heading, a Latin strophe and a Latin heading taken from the late medieval poem of *De Aetatis Homini*, and the text appears as an explanation of this poem.¹² Various actors, not simply the man himself, but also death, the body, the corpse, and Christ, are given voices at different stages. This literary device resembles other late medieval poems, not least in its disputation between the body and the soul. This had also been edited in Danish in a little booklet printed in Copenhagen in 1510, as a frightening example of "a miserable history of a lost soul that accused the body because she was damned to the pains of hell".¹³

De Vita Hominis describes and comments on the stages of human life. In short, this appears as a story of how a prosperous man neglects to think of God and to do good during his lifetime. He is busy with love affairs, with feasts and business, and is concerned for his body instead of his soul. Finally he arrived at old age, and is confronted with illness and death. His money cannot help him any longer, and as he has neither been honest to his friends, nor supported the poor who needed him. He had no one to take care of his soul. He is left alone in the face of death. He realizes how he has been seduced by the world and uselessly squandered his time instead of doing his Christian duties. This has consequences both at the deathbed,

¹¹ Thomissøn 1569, f. 74–77v.

¹² The headings: Nar thu fødhæs/ *Nascens* (When you are born); Nar thu liggher uti wugghe/ *Infans* (When you lie in the cradle); Nar thu gaar offuer vii aar/ *Puer* (When you pass seven years); Nar thu gaar offuer xiiii aar/ *Adolescens* (When you pass fourteen years); Nar thu gaar offær xxviii aar/ *Iuuenis* (When you pass twenty eight years); Nar thu gaar offuær I aar/ *Vir* (When you pass fifty years); Nar thu bliffuær gammel/ *Senex* (When you become old); Nar thu bliffuer graahæret/ *Decrepitus* (When your hair grows grey). The course of life is interrupted by the struggle of death; Nar thu bliffuer siwgh/ *Infirmus* (When you become ill); Nar thu schiffther lydh/ *Mutatio Coloris* (When you change color); Leghomet sisher/ *Verba Corporis* (The body speaks); Nar liiffuet och dødhen stridhael/ *Pugna vite et mortis* (When life and death struggle); Nar hiartet brøster/ *Fractio cordis* (When the heart bursts); Dødhæn han sisher/ (no Latin heading) "Death speaks"; Nar thu æsth dødher/ *Mortuus* (When you are dead); Nar thu jordhes/ *Sepultus* (When you are being buried), and is followed by the resurrection; Nar bassonen gaar/ *Tuba celestis* (When the trumpet sounds); Nar køddhet kommer til benænæ igen/ *Rediens in hominem* (When the flesh returns to the bones again); the Day of Judgement; Nar thu ffar til dommen/ *Pergens ad iudicium* (When you go to the judgement); Thu sisher paa domædaghen/ *Dies Iudicii* / "Day of Judgement" and Cristus vil sighæl/ *Verba Cristi Iudiciis* (Christ will say). On this genre, see Sears 1986.

¹³ "*Her begyndes en ynkelig historie aff een fortabede siel Ther gjorde stoor kære-moll paa kroppen Ath hon war fordømth tijl helwidis pijn*". The booklet was printed by Gotfred of Ghemen, the first printer who settled in Copenhagen. The modern editor of the booklet, Poul Lindegård Hjorth, argues that the 1510 edition is a Danish translation of a Swedish vernacular version from the beginning of the fourteenth century. The poem of the wicked soul describes a quarrel between the soul and the body, a form well known from medieval tradition of the "debate between body and soul genre" since the thirteenth century, both according to several Latin manuscripts as well as numerous redactions into vernacular languages; Hjorth 1971.

“No one wants to look after me”,¹⁴ and also for the afterlife: “Who is going to help me when I am dead/ to give a piece of bread for my soul?”¹⁵ He has, in other words, invested in earthly instead of heavenly happiness. The moral is explicitly stated as an urgent request to the reader to do good while there is time. If not, one will be deceived both here and in the afterlife (cf. “*Pugna Vitae et Mortis*”).

The tragedy of the wealthy man is that his wealth could have ensured his eternal destiny by means of donations and alms, but he has wasted it on earthly pleasure.¹⁶ The horror of the consequences can be understood against the background of the late medieval practice of the “communion of saints”; “late medieval Catholicism was in large measure ‘a cult of the living in the service of the dead’”.¹⁷ The heavenly happiness of the dying man seems to depend on someone who intercedes for his soul, but here he is left alone without friends and intercessors. On his way through death and to the Day of Judgement, he pleads with Christ to save his soul (cf. “*Fractio Cordis*”) and takes refuge in the Virgin Mary (cf. “*Pergens ad Iudicium*”). While Christ’s sentence and division between good and evil is referred to at the stage of the Day of Judgement, it is not stated in the text whether the prayers of the dying man succeeded or not. The outcome is uncertain and seems difficult to predict. This is in accord with one of the important theological premises of the late medieval death culture; the uncertainty of salvation.¹⁸ This uncertainty is turned into an admonition in the concluding verses in which the readers are encouraged to behave righteously during life, and to repay what they have obtained by fraud, “then you will be safe when you are dying/ and will enjoy with the angels and the Virgin Mary/ when God calls you there over”.¹⁹

The function of the text is to remind the reader of his own death. This function is described as a mirror: “If you want happiness and salvation of the soul/ then often look into this mirror/ which I will now present you”.²⁰ The same metaphor recurs when the burial is described in the text. The readers are invited to look at themselves in the mirror when they gaze down at the corpse, wrapped up in a shroud beneath their feet.²¹ The aim of looking into this mirror is to learn what

14 “[I]n ghen wil mig sckødhæ eller see”, *De Vita Hominis* 1514, f. Avi^v (*Infirmitas*).

15 “Hwo schal mig hielpæ nar ieg er død/ giffvæ for myn sjæl eth styckæ brød”, *De Vita Hominis* 1514, f. Bi (*Mutatio Coloris*).

16 Ariès 1981, 193–196.

17 Galpern 1974, 149; Marshall 2002, 7.

18 Reinis 2006; Hamm 2010.

19 “Tha bliffva i trygggha nar i schulla døø / och glades met angla och maria mөө / nar gwd ether hadhen wil kalla”, *De Vita Hominis* 1514, Bviii.

20 “Wilt thu haffua løcka och siælens heyl/ tha see tig offthæ i tetthæ speyl/ som ieg wil tig nw sændhæ”, *ibid*, the introductory verse, Aii.

21 *Ibid*, f. Bv.

attitudes and deeds benefit the soul; “Then you let everyman be your equal/ Do not believe in the world, she will deceive you/ To God you should turn”.²²

The fundamental condition of the text is that death comes when one least expects it, when one is in the prime of life. It is not possible to avoid it either with silver or gold. This is also a common feature of the *memento mori* genres, visualized by the *dance macabre* where no one escapes the grip of death.²³ This is also explained in more detail by the personified death himself later in the text (“*Verba Mortis*”). Death proclaims how every man and woman of every estate is going to be his victim necessarily and without warning.²⁴ Confronted with the inevitable death of one’s own life, the moral appears to be to invest in the afterlife during one’s lifetime. The text also indicates how to do this; good deeds towards equals as well as the needy are emphasized as investment. A penitential practice or any inner disposition is not mentioned. It is reasonable to ask how this arrangement is to be explained according to a late medieval preparation for death.

The arrangement in the text becomes easier to grasp if we compare it to Berndt Hamm’s description of the late medieval art of dying.²⁵ Hamm defines the three uncertainties of death: first, moment of death and way of dying, second, one’s own condition of grace and third, the outcome of the Day of Judgement.²⁶ He also describes how one prepares for death according to a *co-operatio* model. While the preparation for the moment of death consisted in a perfection of the Christian virtues that achieved maximum merit in the hour of death,²⁷ Hamm refers to what he explains as “the protective *Extra-nos*-sanctity” along with this inner formation.²⁸ The centrality of the dying man’s imploring prayers for help, protection and compassion in the *ars moriendi* tradition, points to how important it was for the theologians to place the dying person within a powerful sphere of protection from outside.²⁹ The dying man sought refuge and wrapped himself first and foremost in the vicarious suffering of Christ.³⁰ But this powerful sphere also consisted of the entire earthly and heavenly “*communio sanctorum*”, the angels, the saints, the family and friends who surrounded the deathbed.

22 “*Tha Ladher thu huar mand waræ thin lighæ/ troo æy paa wærdhen hun wil dig swighæ/ til gud sckalt thu tig wændhæ*”, *ibid*, the introductory verse, Aii.

23 Gertsman 2010.

24 Another text in this genre is the added text “Death [speaks] to the reader” in Luther 1538, ff. 35^v–36.

25 Hamm 2010.

26 *Zeitpunkt und Art des Todes, eigenen Gnadenstand, and Ausgang des Gerichts*.

27 *Ibid*, 127.

28 “[D]ie beschirmende *Extra-nos*-Heiligkeit”, *ibid*, 128.

29 “[E]ine Kraftsphäre des Schutzes von aussen”, *ibid*.

30 This is not least evident in the so-called Anselmian questions, which constituted an established part of the *ars moriendi* tradition; cf. Rudolf 1957, 57–58.



Picture 1. The deathbed was a place to worry about the state of one's soul and to ensure salvation by word and deed in the presence of family and friends.

The dying person was thus both dependent on an inner disposition of virtues, as well as of an *extra-nos* sanctification, and Hamm describes how these elements were aligned towards a finalization at the moment of death. Looking back to the pre-Reformation version of *De Vita Hominis*, it is easy to recognize how this text relates merely to one of these elements, which is the *extra-nos* sanctification. And to achieve this “protective *Extra-nos*-sanctity”, one has to invest in good deeds. The other element, the inner disposition of virtues, which was not least expressed through a true and sincere penitence, is not emphasized at all in this text. On the other hand, this element is central to the other texts transmitted together with *De Vita Hominis* by Sir Michel and edited by Pouel Ræff in 1514; the *Expositio pulcherrima super Rosario* and *De Creatione Rerum*. While the *Expositio* explained a devotional practice, the *De Creatione Rerum* explained the story of Adam (and Eve) as an example of penitential practice for all men. The concluding verse states: “This should all men know, That like Adam he did strong penitence and duty and made amends for his sin: so should we do also if we want to escape and avoid the pains of hell”.³¹

When Anders Sørensen Vedel chose *De Vita Hominis* and edited the text in 1571, he thus transmitted a partial picture of the pre-Reformation preparation for death. The transmitted elements were further rearranged according to a new religious practice as we will see in the analysis of Vedel's reading of the text.

³¹ “Thettha sculla alla menniscka widha/ At ligherwiis som adam han giordha strangh penitentz och plicht och bood for syn synd : swo sculla wii och gøre : om wii willa fly oc undgaa halffuedes pyna”, *De Creatione Rerum*, 1514, f. Diii.

An overall perspective should be pointed out before we turn to Vedel's version. The focus on the failed investment of the dying man in the pre-Reformation *De Vita Hominis* underscored a premise of the text, which was the mutual social contract between the living and the dead. One is to do well towards others so that they intercede for one's soul when it becomes necessary. In this version, the way to heaven depends on this mutual relationship. Without the good deeds, and consequently without such intercessors, man is left friendless and alone on his deathbed, and, even worse, without intercessors when he has to face Final Judgement. As this mutual relationship between the living and the dead was such a central premise of the text of *De Vita Hominis*, the changes carried out by Vedel provide a striking example of how this pre-Reformation notion was transformed during the Reformation and was expressed in other ways.

Anders Sørensen Vedel and the Early Modern Religious Context

The religious context of Vedel's edition of the text was defined by the Lutheran Reformation that had been established in Denmark in 1537.³² Vedel, himself born in 1542, was not among the early reformers, but belonged to a generation of educated Lutheran theologians. During studies in Wittenberg, he became inspired by the Christian view of history, not least as it was presented by Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) and Caspar Peucer (1525–1602). After being admitted to his degree in 1562, he returned to Denmark and became part of the circle of Niels Hemmingsen (1513–1600), Melanchthon's pupil who led Danish theology in a Reformed direction. At the time when he edited his version of *De Vita Hominis* he was court preacher at the royal castle of Copenhagen (1568–1581). Despite this important position, his inclination towards the history and language of the Danish people occupied his time as much as possible.

It is not difficult to imagine how his interest was captured by a late medieval Danish text, a poem that testified both to the development of the Danish language as well as to the continuum within the religious sources. The fact that it had been edited at the request of Queen Christina probably also motivated a reprint within the aristocratic circles where Vedel served as historian.³³ Vedel was asked to edit the old book, but it is not known by whom

As a humanist, Vedel sought to raise Danish literature to the level of European literature, not least in his Danish translation of *Saxo Grammaticus* in 1575. Nevertheless, there is also another direction in his works. As Marita Akhøj Nielsen comments, behind his translations the other way, from Danish into Latin, there is an immodest idea that Danish literature also has something to offer the outside

³² Schwarz Lausten 1990 and 1995; Lyby & Grell 1995; Larson 2010.

³³ On Vedel's relation to the aristocracy, see Friis-Jensen 1993.

world.³⁴ Characteristically, this concerns his translations of theological texts, most significantly Niels Hemmingsen's text on the necessary principles of a Christian life, *Via Vitae*, edited in Leipzig in 1574. This little example testifies to one of the conditions of the religious culture of Anders Vedel's time, the notion that Denmark was leading the way as an example of true evangelical religion. Denmark was a shelter for the true faith, and the Protestant King Christian III (r. 1534–1559) was its pre-eminent defender. This idea was confirmed by Melanchthon,³⁵ who also portrayed the Danish nobility as an exemplar for all of Christendom,³⁶ and it was inherent in the ideology of the Danish kings, who defined their role as to protect the true religion that was established in 1537.³⁷

Two years before Vedel's edition of *De Vita Hominis*, the "articles of religion", written by Niels Hemmingsen, were published by Frederick II (r. 1559–1588).³⁸ The intention was to secure the Lutheran confession against the rival Catholic, Calvinistic and Anabaptist confessions. The Catholic religion had been defeated, but it was still described as a threat, not least in Vedel's *Antichristus Romanus*, edited in 1571, the same year as *De Vita Hominis*. According to this and other contemporary texts, the Catholic faith was more than a political threat, it was the false religion, the spiritual Babylon, from which the Danish people had been led by the revelation of the true Gospel. Vedel described his contemporary time as the dangerous last period of history, in which God by his Word had revealed the Roman pope as the Antichrist and through his servants led his people out of Antichrist's grip and into the kingdom of God.³⁹ It is hence no less than wretchedness, pharaonic hardness and devilish blindness when people complain that they are bored with the Gospel and long to return to the ceremonies of the pope.⁴⁰ Vedel exhibited a strong and conscious Lutheran intention in all his theological works. The same inclination can be found in his "improvement" of the meaning of *De Vita Hominis*, which he transformed according to a Lutheran religious practice.

34 Akhøj Nielsen 2005, 4–5.

35 Melanchthon's preface to Laetus 1560, cf. Skovgaard-Petersen 1998; Melanchthon's foreword to *Operum Lutheri Germanicorum*, tom. XII (1559), cf. CR, vol. 9, nr. 6794. Cf not least the correspondence between Melanchthon and Christian III, where the reformer praises the Danish king more than any other regents on earth, cf. Schwarz Lausten 2010, 264–270.

36 Melanchthon's preface in Palladius 1557, f. A2–A6, cf. Oftestad 2015.

37 Cf. the royal announcement (*Kongens kunngjørelse*), KO 1537/39.

38 Rørdam 1886, 126–134.

39 Vedel 1571b, f. (a)iiif.

40 Ibid., f. (a) iiif.

Vedel's Version of *De Vita Hominis*

In his version, Vedel organizes the booklet according to the Danish headings and Latin strophes. He also follows the late medieval text closely, but makes some significant theological changes, which are consequently followed up throughout his version. I will not comment on all the details, but rather concentrate on the most significant changes that concern the premises of the investment in the afterlife.

The fundamental conditions of the message of the pre-Reformation version of *De Vita Hominis* were the uncertainty of the moment of death, the uncertainty of one's own condition of grace as well as the uncertainty of the judgement. Two of these conditions, the uncertain condition of grace and the uncertain judgement, are removed in Vedel's version in accordance with the Lutheran theology that focused the *extra-nos* sanctification on Christ alone and emphasized the certainty of the eschatological justification. When Hamm describes Luther's rearrangement of preparation for death, he points out how this meant a refusal not only of intercessors after death, but also of the *co-operatio* model, and the importance of the inner dispositions finalized towards the moment of death.⁴¹ The new certainty of salvation had consequences both for anthropology and religious practice. In Vedel's version of *De Vita Hominis*, the new certainty and the abolition of purgatory was expressed through a distinct dualism between the wicked and the pious. It was also expressed through a transformation of the relation between the living and the dead, as well as of a transformation of memory.

Transformed According to a Dualistic Worldview

The thorough transformations of the text were reflected in the changed title of the booklet. The pre-Reformation version was introduced as "an instruction and teaching to the advantage of men and to the salvation of the soul";⁴² it had one and the same message for all men. Vedel's version is however introduced with different intentions according to two kinds of men; as consolation for the pious and as terror to the impious.⁴³ This distinction, and hence the dualistic address of the text, depended on the fundamental Lutheran notion of the certainty of salvation.

In contrast to the pre-Reformation version, the separation of man into wicked and pious is continued throughout Vedel's version and expressed most explicitly in the face of the approaching Day of Judgement. The trumpet sounds, the skin again clothes the naked bones and the buried man is to rise from his grave and

⁴¹ Hamm 2010.

⁴² "Met stoer wnderwiissningh och lærdom: til menniskens nyttha. Och sjælsæns saligheed", *De Vita Hominis* 1514, f. A.

⁴³ The title-page reads: "VITA HOMINIS. Undervisning Om Menniskens leffned [...] gantske trøstelig for de Gudfryctige / oc saare gruelig for alle Ugudelige" ("VITA HOMINIS. A teaching on the life of man [...] consoling to the pious / and quite horrible to all the impious"), Vedel 1571a, f. Ai.

walk towards his Judge. In the pre-Reformation version his trembling is expressed as a universal terror; “every heart should bleed because of this”.⁴⁴ This is however changed in Vedel’s reading: it is now not any longer every heart that bleeds, but only the hearts of the wicked; “The evil hearts must bleed”.⁴⁵ The same change occurs before the Judge. In the pre-Reformation version, the dead man prays; “God save me from this danger”, and presents himself among the trembling crowd of people ready to receive the Judge: “how difficult is it to see this day / when everyone cries and no one can laugh/ everyone carries a great danger to himself/ of all those that stand before the Judgement/ no one knows how to escape hell/ because God then will not spare anyone.”⁴⁶

In Vedel’s version, this shared trembling of all men was replaced by a characteristic of the evil: “For the wicked ones, this day is gruesome to see/ They all cry and no one laughs/ everyone carries a great danger to himself: Of all those who stand in front of this one/ The wicked ones/ could not escape the pain/ Because God will not spare them”.⁴⁷ And similarly, to distinguish himself from this group, the dead man counted himself among the other group: “God save *us* from this danger”.⁴⁸ Vedel’s version has thus distinguished between the good and the bad even before the Judge has pronounced. In the version by Sir Michael, the distinction between the good and the wicked appears first in the declaration of Christ following the gathering before the Judge, when Christ judges the good into his community in heaven and the bad to hell.⁴⁹

The dual address in Vedel’s version corresponds with a rearrangement of the hereafter. The removal of purgatory was a consequence of the notion of righteousness and salvation by faith alone. When salvation was secured outside man’s conditions, there was no need of suffering to amend and hence no need of purgatory as a means of preparing for heaven.

The removal of purgatory is both explicit and implicit in the text. The last verse of Vedel’s version refers to a future time when hell will be closed and the power of the devil will be destroyed, while the same verse refers to the time when purgatory will be laid waste in the late medieval version. Whereas the dead in this version stands before the Judge to *mend* what he has offended – referring to the purgatory

44 “[H]werth hiarthæ maa ther foræ blødhæ”; *De Vita Hominis* 1514, f. Bv^v (*Tuba Celestis*).

45 “De onde hjerter maa bløde”; Vedel 1571a, f. Diii^v (*Tuba Archangeli*).

46 “[G]ud frælsæ mi gaff thennæ waadhæ. Hwar swærth er thenne dag at see/ som allæ grædhæ och inghen kan lee/ hwer bær for sig stoer faræ/ Aff allæ the paa dommen staa/ wedh inghen hwo hælwedha kan undgaa/ gud wil tha inghen sparæ”; *De Vita Hominis* 1514, f. Bvii (*Dies Iudicii*)

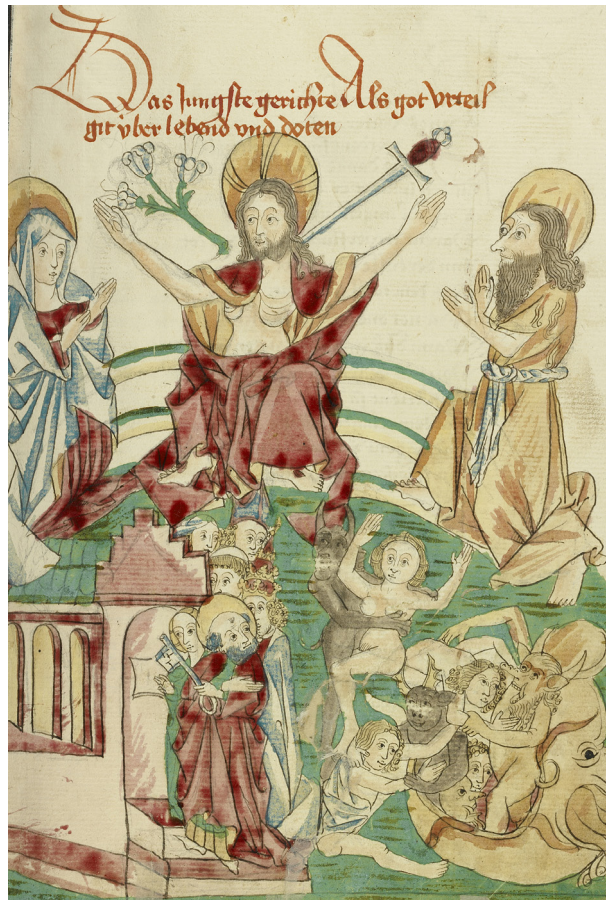
47 “De onde er denne dag grum at see/ De græde alle/ ingen aff dem lee/ huer bærer for sig stor fare: aff alle de som for dennem staa/ De wgudelige/ kunde ey pinen undgaa/ Thi Gud vil dem ey spare”; Vedel 1571a, f. E (*Dies Iudicii*). “We” is also replaced by “the wicked” in the last verse of Vedel’s poem, f. Eii. “Det samme Legeme de onde her bære/ Met Sielen skal det tilsammen være/ Oc brende helffuedis gløde”.

48 “Gud frelse oss fra denne vaade”, Vedel 1571a, f. E.

49 Cf “*Verba Christus iudicis*”. While the late medieval text says that Christ “judges” the good to heaven and the bad to hell, Vedel’s version states that he “calls” the good to heaven and “judges” the bad to hell, Vedel 1571a, f. Ev.

to come, in Vedel's version, the dead *listens* to how he has sinned against God.⁵⁰ Since purgatory as a place and opportunity after death is thus removed in the text and, the question of being pious or not is much more crucial than it was earlier.

This dual address in Vedel's version also accords with a redesign of the *communio sanctorum* in the Protestant theology. It is no longer achieved by a *co-operatio* of inner dispositions and external intercession, but coincides with the community of the followers of the true faith. This went along with the dualistic worldview that sustained the Lutheran religion from the introduction of the Reformation. The Reformation king, Christian III, had established the Danish church firmly on Christ's side in the fight against Satan and the Antichrist, and proclaimed that the Danish people were among the true children of God.⁵¹ The dualism was established both as theological ideology and as royal politics with sociological implications, as in the "foreign articles" edited in 1569. But while the definitions here primarily concerned doctrinal threats, Vedel addresses impious behaviour and inclination. To address the impious with warnings was not something new; it belonged rather to classical religious rhetoric, and resembled such things as the message in the dispute between the body and the soul from 1514. What is however characteristic of the new approach as expressed by Vedel is the proclamation of a distinction between men even before the Last Judgement.



Picture 2. The Last Judgement loomed in the mind of medieval and early modern people. Christ the Judge sentences all souls either to heaven or hell depending on their merits and/or faith.

⁵⁰ *De Vita Hominis* 1514, f. Bvii–Bviii; Vedel 1571a, f. E.

⁵¹ Cf. KO, *Kongens kunngjørelse*, Schwarz Lausten 1989, 150–156.

According to the Lutheran theologians, salvation counted on faith alone at the hour of death as well as in life. This was however explained differently according to theological direction. The emphasis on good deeds in the pre-Reformatory *De Vita Hominis* is transformed not according to a pure notion of faith alone, but according to a notion of deeds as the visible fruits of faith. The old text emphasizing the deeds was thus easily adapted within the Danish theological context of Vedel's time. This context was largely defined by Niels Hemmingsen, who emphasized how faith was recognized by penitence and good deeds, and was expressed by a good conscience, which was most important in the hour of death.⁵²

In Vedel's version of *De Vita Hominis*, the principle of a certain salvation was ensured by the proclaimed dualism in the address, as well as with a few inserts that emphasise obedience to the word of God as well as penitence as the secure path. The evil consequences accrue to those who have rejected the word of God, and the final message is summarized in the message: repent in time.⁵³

A Transformed Relation between the Living and the Dead

The security of salvation undercuts the very heart of the pre-Reformation *De Vita Hominis*. This crux was the experience of lack of intercession when the dying man, as a consequence of his wicked life, had to die a lonely death. According to the Lutheran theology, however, man was always alone in the face of death, as Luther himself put it: "*Wir sind alle zum tode gefoddert und wird keiner fur den andern sterben*".⁵⁴ Man could only be saved by the knowledge of faith. The necessary dependence on intercession that caused the tragedy in the pre-Reformation version of the text is hence made irrelevant, and it is consequently rejected in Vedel's version. While one was exhorted to pray for the deceased in the late medieval text, this was no longer relevant. The dead were no longer dependent on the living, and the mutual relationship was broken.

What can be seen, however, is that the concern for the salvation of one's departed is not just removed, but rather transformed into other material ways of concern. A central point in Peter Marshall's "Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England" is that this concern was most resistant to being wiped out by the Reformation.

52 Cf. Hemmingsen 1577, and N. Palladius, 1558: "*Thi it menniskis døds stund der hans Domme Dag/ oc med huad hiertelau hand dør/ med det same kommer hand for Dom/ Thi endog Legemet leggis ned til huile udi Graffuen/ Dog farer sielen ud aff Legemet heden til den sted/ udi huilken Gud haffuer beskicket/ en skal bliffue udi til domme Dagen/ oc tager med sig enten en ond/ eller en god samuittighed/ Enten en viss forhoffning til den euige salighed/ eller en uiss fryct for den euige fordømmelse*" ("Because Man's hour of death is his Judgement day/ and with what kind of heart he dies / with the same kind he stands before the Judgement/ Because even if the body is put down to rest in the tomb/ the soul however travels out of the body to a place/ where God has ordained/ it to be until Judgement Day/ and it takes with it either an evil/ or a good consciousness/ Either a certain hope of eternal salvation/ or the certain terror of eternal damnation") (f. Aiiii^v).

53 Vedel 1571a, f. Eii^v–Eiii.

54 WA 10/3,1,15f and 2,1f.: followed by: "*So muss ein Jederman selber die hauptstück, so einen Christen belangen, wol wissen und gerüst sein*".

Consequently, it was actually not removed, but rather expressed in other ways.⁵⁵ Vedel's changes in the text show exactly this. Where the medieval text spoke about concern for the suffering soul of a deceased person, the revised post-Reformation text points out consolation of the dying man, concern for the funeral and for the memory of the deceased. I will explain this through the most relevant paragraphs of the text.

The transformation of the concern for the dead is already evident in the description of the first stage of life; "When you are born" (*Nascens*). In this paragraph, the relation with the mother illustrates human life as a mutual dependency on others, a dependency that should be repaid when it is needed, which means in death. The relation and obligations towards the mother are described in two verses; to honour her, please her, give her gifts and help her. Vedel follows the late medieval version closely, except when it comes to her death. The old version insists that one should not let one's mother suffer long in purgatory, regardless of the troubles it takes: "help her, is what you should let stand firm/ not only in life, but also after her death/ let her not endure much the pains of purgatory/ if you ride with a hundred horses".⁵⁶



Picture 3. In this woodcut from *Der Seelen-Wurzgarten* (1483), each deadly sin has its parallel torment in purgatory.

⁵⁵ Marshall 2002.

⁵⁶ "[H]ielp hennæ thet thu kant læsthæ/ Ey enesthæ i liffua, mæn efther hennæ død/ lad hennæ ey møghet taalæ skiærsildet nød/ ridhær dhu met hundredhæ hæstæ", *De Vita Hominis*, 1514, f. Aiii.

In Vedel's version, however, the concern for the dead mother is expressed in the arrangement of an honest funeral: "Turn everything to the best for her / the time she lives in all her needs /With honest funeral after her Death/ even if you ride with a hundred horses".⁵⁷ The concern for the dead soul is replaced here by the obligation to arrange a proper funeral. And in the contemporary funeral sermons this obligation is explained as one of the deeds proper for the dead.⁵⁸

Another change in Vedel's text expresses the transformation of concern for the soul into pastoral consolation at deathbed. In the pre-Reformation version, the dying man is afraid, expressing this in the fear that nobody will care for his soul after death: "Who will help me when I am dead/ give a piece of bread for my soul?"⁵⁹ In Vedel's version, active concern for the soul is no longer demanded, but is replaced with a rhetorical question: "Who will help me when I am dead/ who can comfort me in such a need?"⁶⁰ The implied answer is that nothing worldly, not even your own family or friends can provide you proper consolation. This is also the premise of the next stanza ("When life and death struggles"/ *"Pugna vitæ et mortis"*), where Vedel proclaims faith alone as the only secure ground for a dying man.

In the pre-Reformation version, the premise of the stanza on the fight between life and death is set by the previous stages, the dying man having conducted his life in such a way that no one cared for him or interceded for his soul. All they cared for was to take charge of his property. The pitiful prospect is that his wife and his friends will quarrel over what he has left in the hour when he is carried to the grave. The dying man lamented the grave consequences: "A *Pater Noster* I will never receive/ more than the time I stand dead on the floor/ of this you must all take notice/ It has to be a pain of the heart/ I have no friends when I am dead/ besides monks and priest and clerks".⁶¹ He can trust neither his friends nor his small children as "they let me burn in pain".⁶² The lesson was clear and was proclaimed as follows: "I ask all of you now to look around/ Do good for yourselves while you have time". The text concluded with a warning: "If not you will be deceived both here and there/ This I tell you/ this comes true/ this everyone surely should know".⁶³

57 "[V]end hende allting til bæste/ Den stund hun leffuer i all hendis nød/ Met erlig Jordeferd effter hendis Død/ Rider du end met hundrede hæste, Vedel 1571a, f. B.

58 For example, in the sermon addressed to the widow of Anders Bing, cf. Lauridsen 1593, f. Cv.

59 Cf. note 22.

60 "[H]vo skal mig hielpe naar ieg er død/ hvo kand mig trøste i saadan nød", Vedel 1571a, f. Cii.

61 "En pater noster ieg aldrig faar/ lengher end ieg døder paa gulffued staar/ thet maa wel allæ mærckæ/ Thet maa wæl waræ en hiarthens nød/ ieg haffuer ey wæn nar ieg er død/ udhen mwnccka: och præsther: och klærcka", *De Vita Hominis* 1514, f. Bii.

62 "[I] pinæ ladhæ the mig brændhæ", *ibid.*

63 "Jeg bedher nw allæ i see ether om/ gører goth for ether mædhen i haffuæ rom/ ther mwæ i sielffuæ paa lidhæ/ Ellers i bliffua swighenæ baadhæ hær oc hist/thet sigher ieg nw : thet bliffuer alt wist/ thet schal huær wissælighen widhæ", *ibid.*



Picture 4. This Book of Hours (ca. 1430–1440) shows the office for the dead. Candles and torches could be were important status indicators at funerals.

In Vedel's version, the premise of intercession was no longer relevant and the example of the dying man received another meaning. While the point in the first version was that the man had caused this miserable lonely occasion himself, the point in the changed version is that the material world has nothing to offer when the hour of death arrives. The complaint about no *Pater Noster* is replaced by "Nothing more I then receive from the world/ when I stand dead on the floor".⁶⁴ The sentence that refers to the prayers of the clergy is replaced by an affirmation of the pain caused by being left alone in death: "I have no friends when I am dead/ it makes my heart suffer",⁶⁵ and the sentence that referred to him being left in purgatory is replaced by an affirmation that his friends and children could do nothing. "No help

64 "Intet mere ieg da aff Verden faar/ Naar ieg døder paa gulffuet staar", Vedel 1571a, f. Ciiiv.

65 "Jeg haffuer ey venner naar ieg er død/ Det gjør mit hierte at vercke", *ibid.*

they could give me”.⁶⁶ The final lesson was also transformed. While the readers are still exhorted to do good while there is still time, this was nevertheless explained not according to investing in intercession, but as a consequence of faith: “I ask all of you to look around/ Do good while you have time/ This you can trust: / if not you will be deceived both here and there/ if you don’t believe in Jesus Christ/ this everyone surely should know”.⁶⁷

Transformation of Memory

In Vedel’s version of the next stanza (*“Pugna vitæ et mortis”*), faith alone is what counts, and the lack of intercession or concern seems hence to constitute no problem other than an emotional reaction of sad loneliness. However, it is relevant to ask what such loneliness implied in a Protestant context. Perhaps the text gives a clue in the *“Mutatio coloris”* stanza, where the pre-Reformation version reads: “Quite little I have sent ahead of me/ The time I have been alive/ Hence as I come I am unknown/ and I will forever be”.⁶⁸ A deceased person who does not receive his friends’ prayers is described as “unknown”. The investment in friends and good deeds, which in the face of death brought about intercession, is presented as an investment in the future life and described according to the notion of “memory” in the pre-Reformation version of the text.

In Vedel’s version of the same paragraph, he inserted a short explanation. He had “sent little ahead”, because he was “like the rich glutton/ with injustice, violence and deceit”. His evil and less memorable deeds were what caused him to be unknown by men and will forever be.⁶⁹ In the pre-Reformation version, to be unknown implied that the dying person left this world without intercessors. To be remembered was a liturgical category that implied being prayed for before God, as the Good Thief had begged Christ; “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42). In Vedel’s version, to be unknown meant that no one found a reason to uphold the memory of the deceased, which has to be understood in accordance with the early modern memorial culture. To be remembered meant to shine forth in his good deeds as an example to the living. Such a remembrance was just what the preachers aimed at in constructing in the contemporary funeral works, which was also the context of Vedel’s edition of *De Vita Hominis*.

66 “Ingen hielp kunde de mig giøre”, *ibid.*

67 “Jeg beder eder alle i see eder om/ Giører gaat den stund i haffue rom/ Der kunde i noget paa lide: /Ellers vorder i svegen her og hist/ Om i tro icke paa Jesum Christ/ Det skal huer visselig vide”, *ibid.*

68 “Fuld lideth haffuer ieg foræ mig sænt/ mædhen ieg haffuer wæreth i liffuæ/ Thiid som ieg kommer er ieg ukænt/ och ieg schal ewigh bliffuæ”, *De Vita Hominis* 1514, f. Bi.

69 “Ganske lidet haffuer ieg for mig send/ Den stund ieg haffuer været i liffue/ Den rige Fraadzere lig/Met wret vold oc suig: Thi bliffuer ieg aff huer mand wkiend/ hen skickis som ieg skal evig bliffue”, Vedel 1571a, f. Cii.

Vedel's *De Vita Hominis* in the Protestant Memorial Culture

In his introduction, Vedel dedicated the booklet to the Danish nobleman and overlord Christoffer Valkendorf (1525–1601).⁷⁰ Vedel had several benefactors among the Danish nobility. Some were mentioned in the preface to his edition of *Saxo Grammaticus* in 1575, Christoffer Valkendorf being one of them. One of Vedel's services in return to these noblemen was to preach at his friends' funerals, or as in this case, to raise their memory. The occasion seems to be somehow related to Valkendorf being appointed royal administrator in Gotland in that year, 1571. Vedel, however, places the poem within the context of the memory of Valkendorf's brother, Axel, who had died six years before.⁷¹ This context, consisting both of a testimony of Axel Valkendorf's life and death, as well as an added epitaph both in Danish and Latin, makes Anders Vedel's edition of *De Vita Hominis* an example of memorial literature with the same function as the published funeral works.

The genre of published funeral works, which generally appeared with a sermon and a funeral biography, arose at the princely houses in Saxony-Anhalt in the 1550s, and was continued by other dynasties associated with the Wittenberg Reformation.⁷² Because of the close connections between the king, the nobility and the Lutheran priesthood of Denmark-Norway on the one hand, and the Wittenberg reformers on the other, it comes as no surprise that funeral works were published for the Danish nobility from as early as 1565.⁷³ This was also the year in which Axel Valkendorf had died. The text relates not only how the Danish reformers transformed the concept of death, but also how the deceased, at least the nobility, were remembered within the Danish Lutheran culture.

Vedel addressed Christoffer Valkendorf, reminding him of a gathering that had once taken place in the home of Lady Karine, the second wife of Bjørn Andersøn, the palace steward in Copenhagen.⁷⁴ Their hospitable home often housed the powerful men of the time and was also open to the young historian Vedel. There Vedel heard accounts of the heroic deeds of noblemen, those of Axel Valkendorf

70 Christoffer Valkendorf was an important man in the administration of the kingdom of Denmark-Norway. He was appointed royal administrator – in different periods – to Bergenhus, Iceland, Gotland and Stavanger, he was member of the Council of State (*riksrådet*) from 1576, and, was appointed *Stattholder* in Copenhagen, second only to the king in power, from 1579.

71 Axel Valkendorf was killed at the Falkenberg heaths during the Nordic Seven Years' War (1563–1578) on 20 October 1565.

72 Moore 2006, 100.

73 The terminology refers to Moore 2006, 19. Niels Hemmingsen's sermon for Herluf Trolle (1565) is often referred to as the first funeral sermon printed in Denmark, Billeskov Jansen 1990. The early origin of the printed Danish funeral works distinguishes the Danish tradition from that in Sweden, where the first printed funeral work occurs in 1598. It is more relevant to compare the Danish tradition with the Lutheran heartlands in Saxony and Württemberg. The printed Danish funeral sermons (ca. 40 registered works) from the period 1565–1600 had been composed for the funerals of the higher nobility; see Oftestad 2015.

74 Cf. Wegener 1851, 59.

being among them.⁷⁵ Lady Karine had related how the sisters of Valkendorf had asked their brother Axel why he spent so much more time than other people in his prayer chamber. To this, he had answered that one could never pray enough. Moreover, if the only thing to pray for was a Christian and blissful departure, then this alone would be enough to pray for as long as we lived on earth. What happens next is not only an example of the central position of the moment of death in this religious culture, but also of how a preacher, sensitive to good testimonies of the deceased, collected the elements to construct an edifying memory. Vedel refers how he was astonished by Axel's pious answer and had followed up by asking about his last hours. Christoffer Valkendorf had then talked about his brother's death, which was caused by a shot during the siege of Falkenberg in 1565. Hearing this, Vedel immediately wrote an epitaph in Latin, and at the request of Christoffer Valkendorf, also a translation in Danish.⁷⁶

The epitaph had so pleased Christoffer Valkendorf that because of this, Vedel claimed to have dedicated the booklet, including *De Vita Hominis*, to him as a reminder "that everyone in his days of prosperity, should behave himself such that he with a Christian departure/ could walk as an heir into the reign of heaven and the eternal life".⁷⁷ Axel Valkendorf's pious life and Christian departure thus shine forth as an example of one who had followed the central message of *De Vita Hominis*, and consequently as a blessed opposition to the wicked man described in the text.

Vedel did not dedicate the booklet to Valkendorf as consolation as was frequently done in similar introductions,⁷⁸ but rather as a remembrance of Axel Valkendorf. Perhaps the long time that had passed since Axel's death made consolation for the brother less urgent than ordinarily. But perhaps the lack of a published funeral work for this important royal military man made the promotion of Christoffer Valkendorf to royal administrator at Gotland just a suitable occasion to raise his brother's memory. The late Axel Valkendorf thus became a paragon of virtue for the benefit of his brother Christoffer Valkendorf about to commence his administrative and religious duties at Gotland.

It is reasonable to emphasize the Protestant memorial culture as the opposite of the miserable fortune of the dying man in *De Vita Hominis*. The genre of printed funeral works and dedicated booklets, like Vedel's edition of *De Vita Hominis*, became an important element in this culture in which the memory of the deceased was upheld and preserved.

75 "[E]der dragis vel til minde/ huad tale der fält en gong ind/ om eders kiere Broder salige Axel Valkendorp/ hoss Velbyrdige oc Gudfryctige Frue Karine Biørn Andersssøns", Vedel 1571a, f. Aii.

76 Cf. Wegener 1851, 59–60. Vedel wrote three epitaphs on the occasion of Axel Valkendorf's death; one Latin prose, one Latin poem as well as a Danish version of the poem, all printed at the end of the edition of *De Vita Hominis*, 1571.

77 "[A]t huer udi sin velmact skal saa beskicke sig/ at hand ved en Christelig affgang / kand træde en Arffuing ind i Himmerigis rige oc det euige Liff", Vedel 1571a, f. Aii'.

78 Oftestad forthcoming 2015.

Conclusion

Anders Sørensens Vedel's edition of *De Vita Hominis* is a concise little example of the transformation of the religious culture of Denmark in the aftermath of the Reformation. Vedel's education and career and his reputable theological and historical works mean that his revision can be considered an important example of how the early Danish Protestant theologians interpreted and transformed the pre-Reformation literature on death.

When Vedel revised *De Vita Hominis*, he re-arranged the elements of an anonymous late medieval text and transformed it according to an established Lutheran faith. Thus, his revision neither represents a continuous use of a source nor the negation of the late medieval heritage, but rather a conscious establishment of continuity between the religious practice of his own days and the previous generations. What the Lutheran faith defined as foreign elements were abolished and replaced by the new religious practice.

The pre-Reformation version of *De Vita Hominis* was intended to remind the reader of his own death and urge him or her to invest in good deeds and a just life to secure intercession when death arrived. This constituted a central element in the pre-Reformation preparation for death, and was completed by a focus on the formation of inner dispositions as it appeared in the texts that had been transmitted together with *De Vita Hominis*. The premise of the message in *De Vita Hominis* was a community of living and dead, expressed in the duty to intercede for the souls of the deceased. As a contrast to this community, the edifying text depicts the horror of dying alone, without friends or intercessors. The miserable man appears as a warning to the readers: invest in the afterlife while you live!

When the text was edited anew by Vedel in 1571, the experience of dying alone was still used as a warning. It had, however, a different function in Vedel's religious context. The miserable situation confirmed another message: when it came to death, this world had nothing to offer. The only thing that was counted was faith. While the theology of the Reformation abolished the uncertainty of salvation, one of the fundamental conditions was still the same since the hour of the inescapable death remained always unknown.

The booklet was presented in a way that confirmed Vedel's changes to the message. While the late medieval text was a general warning, a *memento mori* presented to all men, among general devotional literature, Vedel's edition is presented in connection with a particular person, to raise the memory of Axel Valkendorf. Both the introduction as well as the added epitaphs in Latin and Danish point to Valkendorf's exemplary life and death. In this respect, *De Vita Hominis* functions as an antitype that sets off Valkendorf's pious life and Christian death as a glorious example to the living. He is remembered through these texts. He is remembered not by his sisters' intercession for his soul, which there is no need for as he already is counted among the blessed ones, but by the exhibition of his faith.

In the epitaph that concludes the book, Valkendorf was praised for his glorious deeds, giving his life for the fatherland. However, these deeds were not the reason for true honour and joy which can only be achieved by a Christian death. The final verse proclaimed the moral: "Then everyone should skillfully learn this art/ while he is alive/ the one who wants to die well/ he has to behave well/ this only can be given by God".⁷⁹ What then was Valkendorf's good behaviour? It was clearly underlined in the introduction. He had always prayed for a Christian death. He invested in his afterlife, not by alms, donations or glorious deeds that brought about intercessors, but by prayers that reinforced his own faith and strengthened his dependence on Christ alone. Consequently, after his death, he depended neither on his brother Christoffer nor on his sisters. He had taken care of his own Christian departure alone.

A reading of Vedel's corrections of the late medieval *De Vita Hominis* displays that the notion of investment in the afterlife was a continuum through the religious transformations which was brought about by the Reformation. What the investment consisted in was however described according to different religious premises. While the pre-Reformation version emphasized that one should invest in intercession, the post-Reformation version emphasized faith and prayer during life. When Christoffer Valkendorf raised the memory of his brother Axel, he presented him as an example of faith, and invested in his brother's immortality through printed letters. While donations and alms were a way to secure remembrance before God in the late medieval version, money still secured a memorial in the early Protestant culture. According to the new religious premises, however, it could only secure this memorial in the human world left behind.

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⁷⁹ "Saa lære sig huer den konst met skel/ Den stund hand er i liffue/ huo vil vel dø/ hand leffue sig vel/ Det kand Gud eniste giffue", Vedel 1571a, f. Eiiii'.

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Dicing towards Death: An Oracle Game for Miners at the Falun Copper Mine from the Early Seventeenth Century

Iris Ridder

University of Dalarna

In the early seventeenth century, the city of Falun was among the most important cities in Sweden because of its profitable copper mine, called Stora Kopparberget (the Great Copper Mountain). Working as a miner was, particularly in this period, a dangerous profession with high risks. The lives of the miners were frequently exposed to the unpredictability of this dangerous work, and mine accidents were a constant peril. During the Middle Ages and the early modern period, both the accidents and misfortune which befell the miners as well as their successes and wealth were seen as expressions of God's plan for salvation. People therefore often turned their faith into religious or magical strategies in their effort to protect their lives.

The aim of this article is to highlight the connection between dicing and dying in early modern mining industry by analysing an oracular dice game book for miners, printed in Stockholm in 1613. A local mining clerk, Gisle Jacobson, published the text, entitled Ett litet Tidhfordriff (A small pastime), which exploits the peculiar fact that the miners at Stora Kopparberg made decisions with the help of a ritualized dice game.

Introduction

Death was always present in older societies, but few social groups were as generally aware of it in their daily work as miners and their families. For the miners at Stora Kopparberg in the Swedish region of Dalarna, being killed without warning and being exposed to a sudden and unforeseen death (Lat. *mors repentina et improvisa*), a Bad Death (Lat. *mala mors*) was a characteristic of the profession.¹ As described in the introduction to this volume, the art of dying demanded preparation and planning. An *ars moriendi* which would encourage a harmonious and conscious

¹ For *mors repentina et improvisa* which was considered a bad death (*mala mors*), see Kaiser 1983, 65 and Ariès 2008, 10, 108, 118. For the significance of the place of death, see Ariès 2008, 107.

“good” death, a death which one was prepared for, was an experience that not all miners had the advantage of experiencing. If it happened that miners died in a mine collapse, it was not even certain that the body could be found, in which case a church burial would be prevented.

Therefore, this group of professionals put their faith in magical and supernatural practices in their attempts to avoid their own violent and unexpected deaths. They used various oracles and other superstitious activities sometimes practised in the form of games. Today, we know of one game in particular, a dice game called the “*dobblet*” or “*dobblet vid gruvstugan*” (gambling at the mining cottage) which is exceptional for the mine as a place of work and also crucial for its internal organization and the taxation of the mine’s yield. The miners used this game to agree upon the order in which the work cooperatives were allowed to operate in various mining chambers at Stora Kopparberg. The game was played over many centuries on the most significant and mystical day of the year, New Year’s Day, in order to help the miners make difficult decisions in connection with the organization of this hazardous work.²

Among the various forms of superstitious practices that developed at the mine, I found a strange little oracular game book entitled *A small pastime (Ett litet Tidhfördriff)*, which was printed in Stockholm on 2 September 1613.³ The booklet was obviously written at Stora Kopparberg, and is one of Sweden’s few examples of fiction from the working community during the early modern period. One exciting thing about the text is that it does not rework or translate a German (or Latin, French or English) original, like so many other Swedish texts from this period. The booklet is unique for this Swedish mining environment from the beginning of the seventeenth century, and reflects this specific milieu in a special way. Nevertheless, the text has not been noticed in Swedish literary history, since it does not fit into the familiar early modern literary genres. Unlike many entertainment texts from this period, this work of fiction is not anonymous and has no dedication. The author’s name is Gisle Jacobson and, among other things, his text concerns chance, luck and God’s almighty power. The booklet illustrates not only how the miners attempted to prevent dangerous situations by looking into the future, but also shows their feelings towards the omnipotence of chance in relation to the idea of God’s providence.⁴

2 For a discussion of the game in connection with the work in the mine during medieval and early modern times, see Ridder 2013b. On the miners’ belief in supernatural beings, see Forslund 1924; Åmark 1951; Tillhagen 1981.

3 Collijn 1943, 418.

4 See my article on the subject, Ridder 2013a, in which I describe the attitude to games of chance and fortune during that period. In Ridder 2013b, 327–330, I mention the parallels between this fortune-telling book and a medieval game by the name of *Ludus regularis seu clericalis*, a dice game developed by a pious monk in the tenth century, which has strong similarities with the miners’ oracle game.

Today, the function and meaning of Gisle Jacobson's text is rather hard for a modern reader to comprehend. In one of the most important standard works on Swedish mining history, *Gruvbrytningen och kopparhantering vid Stora Kopparberget intill 1800-talets början* from 1955, the historian Sten Lindroth comments that Gisle Jacobson was a man of "literary ambition", which resulted "in a quite special product, called A small pastime" which "presented a collection of faithful didactic poems, amply linked to the game for the mining shift rooms which was well-known to the Kopparberg's miners".⁵

This wording illustrates that Lindroth has not really understood the point of the mining clerk's "literary ambition" and that his "special product" is as much a poetic text as a parlour game for miners. However, research in literary history on early modern narratives, with their sometimes experimental and unconventional hybrid forms, was not especially voluminous in the middle of the 1950s.⁶ Oracular gaming texts, or dice fortune books (*Würfellosbücher*) as they are also called, belong to a mixed genre, and have been noted to some extent in German research on literary history.⁷

The starting-point of Gisle Jacobson's text, its *inventio*, is the miners' dicing ritual, the "*dobblet*". The text deals with the discrepancy between the observation of contingency and the expected providence in each lot, which is based on the throw of the dice. The die as an oracular instrument symbolized life's unpredictability and the vagaries of Lady Luck. There is a long philosophical discourse on people's thoughts about chance in relation to God's almighty power in which the problem was solved theologically by letting Lady Luck constitute a part of God's plan.⁸ The Western philosophical tradition deals with the question of random events by using the term contingency, which describes something which is temporarily what it is, but which could also have turned out differently. This goes back to Aristotle, and links etymologically to the Latin verb *contingere*, which literally means "to touch each other".⁹ Thus, contingencies are events that are neither necessary nor impossible, and which coincide in time and space but unpredictably. A thing or event happens either in one way or another. The door can be open or closed. Therefore, contingency refers to the future and how it could be represented, but implies more than simply chance, since chance actualizes contingency and the fact that the world and future are not determined and governed by a higher power.

As a result, the term contingency is in opposition to the idea of the world being predictable through God, which is called providence, or the Latin term *providentia dei*, and is, for example, manifested in situations where decisions are to be made.

5 Lindroth 1955, 67.

6 This still can be a problem; see Ridder 2012.

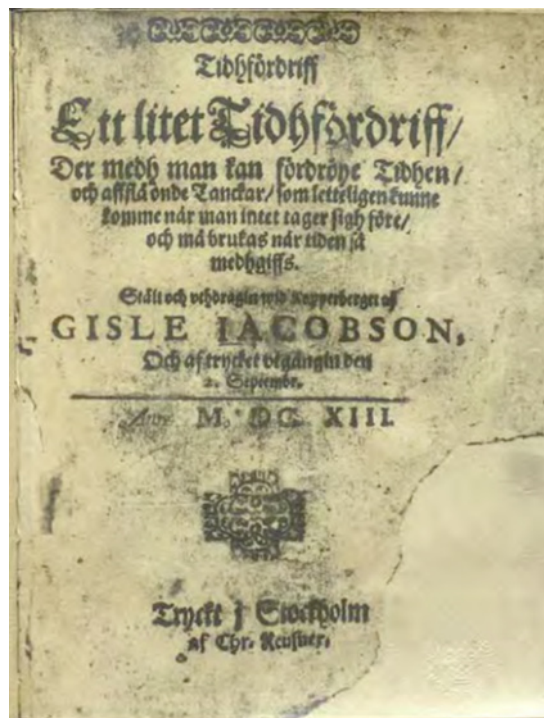
7 About *Würfellosbücher* and *Losbücher*, see Böhm 1932/1933; Bolte 1925 and the bibliography Zollinger 1996.

8 Walter Haug has drawn our attention to the fact that medieval people understood that conditions in the form of Lady Luck having no place in God's plan is the solution to the contingency problem, in particular where she is offered as the one mastering this contingency, Haug 1995, 1, 7.

9 The Latin term *contingentia* is a translation of Aristotle's *endechémenon*, which means possible.

Contingency occurs in the obvious randomness of catastrophes or disasters, which becomes more observable in societies where technological developments bring with them the risk of accidents and the danger of an unpredictable and quick death.¹⁰ Catastrophes in connection with technological developments, in contrast with natural disasters, for example, affect human attitudes to the environment and other people, which is clearly illustrated by the description of catastrophes or disasters after the event.¹¹ In the same way, the early form of capitalism which developed at the Stora Kopparberg had a strong influence on people's relationship with and attitude to negative events and death. People threw dice to test their individual luck, and the general view was that luck in connection with games that rest on chance is an expression of some form of divine favour. Luck demonstrates that higher powers are sympathetic towards the player.

The aim of this article then is to emphasize the connection between dicing and dying, and to illustrate how miners dealt with their life-threatening work by using dice as an instrument for decision-making in their dangerous but frequently lucrative working conditions. At first, I will introduce the oracle book, its author and the miner's dice game. I then use contemporary sources to describe how this dangerous work was perceived, and how people at that time dealt with risk and danger. After this, I will illustrate various superstitious practices to place the miners' rituals in a larger context.



Picture 1. Title page of Gisle Jacobson's *A small pastime (Ett litet Tidhfordriff)* printed in Stockholm in 1613.

¹⁰ In this regard, the history of life insurance is interesting, as it started to take shape seriously during the eighteenth century in England where they could also bet on other people's lives in a more organized way, which was later banned. For this, see Clark 1999.

¹¹ Clarke & Short 1993, 377–379.

Dobblet vid gruvstugan (Gambling at the Mining Cottage)

The full title of Jacobson's booklet is *A small pastime, wherewith one can delay time and get rid of evil thoughts, which can easily come when one has nothing to do and to be used when time allows*.¹² The text is not very long; in a modern edition, it comprises about 20 pages. Directly after the title-page, before the oracular text begins, the booklet offers a passage called *Education (Underwisznig)*, followed by an address to the reader (*Til Läsaren*). The text is meant to be entertaining and thought of as a diversion when you are depressed and have been afflicted by evil thoughts. You are allowed to use the text if you do not have anything else, that is, more reasonable things to do. The modern concepts of "leisure" and "entertainment" are not applicable in an early modern context, and to understand what exactly is meant here, we should look at the passage called *Education*, which consists of a kind of manual:

My name is A small pastime. If anyone agrees to spend some time and wants to do it right, you must get three dice. Then you wish for something, preferably something honourable. And when you then throw the dice, you must remember the score and look it up in the book. [...] If you are two or more players, everyone should freely throw the dice and then interpret without force or danger the answer they get from the text. If anyone should not be able to manage it, there are hopefully good interpreters among the party who can help by giving advice and ideas.¹³

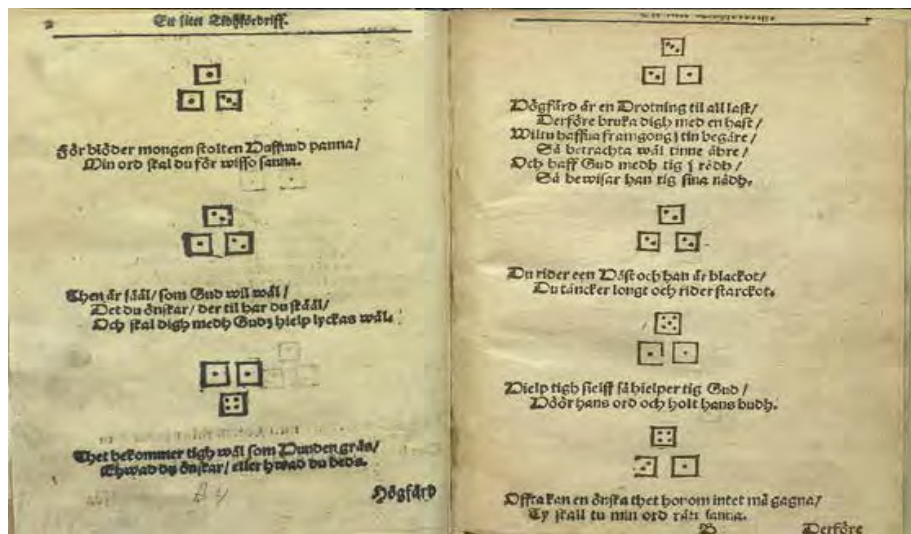
Clearly, the text should not just be read. To use it correctly, the reader should fetch three dice, wish for something "that can bring the best of honour" ("*helst kan lända til ähra*", A2^r), throw the three dice, and then look for the same score in the booklet. Three six-sided dice, numbered from one to six, give a total of 56 different combinations if you throw all three simultaneously. Consequently, the text itself consists of 56 rhymed stanzas, combined with schematic pictures of three dice that are linked to all possible combinations. The description given above provides the rules of the game which, according to the text, shall be used to amuse the miners or junior mining-hands, for example, in connection with a journey.

The booklet can be read as a narrative but since its conception is based on the miners' game, it also functions as a parlour game. When the miner then wishes for

12 Gisle Jacobson, *Ett litet Tidhfödriff/ Der medh man kan fördröye Tidhen/ och affslå onde Tanckar/ som lettelligen kunne komme när man intet tager sigh före/ och må brukas när tiden så medhgiffs/ stält och vthdragin wid Kopperberget af Gisle Iacobson och af trycket vtgångin den 2. septembr. 1613*. Stockholm. All original quotes from the text in the article are my modernized translations. See the edition of the text and my German translation in Ridder 2014, 264–303.

13 "Eet litet Tidhfödriff må jagh heta/ Om någon wil efter migh leta/ Och der hoos wil migh rätt förstå/ Skäl han lata efter try Terningar gå/ Och sedan en god önskan begära/ Den honom helst kan lända til ähra/ Och sedan kasta medh Terningar try/ Så skal han wäl merckia och si/ Hwar han får samma ögen igän/ [...] Ähre j flere än två eller trij/ Skäl hwar kasta sitt kast frij/ Och hwar sielf sins kasts vthtydare wara/ Förutan all nögdh och fahra/ Kan en det icke allene göre/ Hoppes man det att see och höre/ Att ibland selskap finnes vthtydare gode/ Det man icke annan kan förmode/ Som leggie för hwar annan löök opål" (A2^r– A2^v)

something honourable and throws the dice, this throw leads him to a poem that is thought of as a lottery oracle. Every poem gives the miner different rules for living and moral advice as an answer to a wish made before he threw the dice.



Picture 2. Oracle game text in Gisle Jacobson's *A small pastime* (*Ett litet Tidhfordriff*). The booklet shows all the 56 combinations of the three thrown dice with a rhyme stanza for each and every combination.

The author's name is printed on the title-page, and he has even signed his address to the reader. Gisle Jacobson was one of the first mining clerks in the Falun mine at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The title of mining clerk was administratively a very important post, which meant the maintaining the register of such things as fires in the mine or minutes from inspections. Such a post was not granted to just anyone, and it is shown that the author had a past within the Royal Chancery.¹⁴ He owned a part of a smelting shed, and lived with his wife in Falun, at least some of the time.¹⁵ This explains why he was familiar with the environment, the town and the people, and why he knew about the *dobblet vid gruvstugan*.

A closer investigation of the medieval documents related to this game demonstrates that many functions which have to do with mining organization were linked to this custom. This ritualized lottery took place once a year around New Year, and Gisle Jacobson has described it in one of two poems which follow the dice game text itself and end his booklet. One poem is a pious admonition to the junior mining-hands, and the other is called *Yet another way to throw three dice*

14 Lagergren 1913, 16. Contemporaneous sources state that he had been working as a customs clerk or "*kegenskrivare*" in Stockholm at least until 1593 and in Åbo between 1595 and 1599. De Brun 1924, 822f. Gisle Jacobson is mentioned several times between 1587 and 1615 in *Stockholms stads tänkeböcker*. Nikula & Nikula 1997, 213 lists him for the period between 1595 and 1599. He then came to Falun, where he was mentioned in the Kopparberg church accounts between 1614 and 1620, but not the following years. This information is in *Biographia Cuprimontana*, a collection of biographical material on people who are associated with the copper mine in Falun and its company, Stora Kopparbergs Bergslag AB. The collection is found in the company archive of Stora Enso AB, now the archive centre of Dalarna.

15 According to one of Eric Hammarström's unprinted collections.

used by the Miners at Stora Kopparberg (Ännu ett annat sätt att kasta med tre tärningar som används av Bergsmännen vid Stora Kopparberget), a description of the *dobblet vid gruvstugan*. This poem addresses a person who means to visit the copper mine in Falun, a place which was already a well-known attraction:

At the Stora Kopparberg mine, you usually do what gives the miners both honour and fame. Every miner must hurry to throw three dice at New Year. Those who manage to score highest may be first in the pair line and have an advantage over the others, who must wait further down the pair line. But the one coming last will be stuck there because of his low and unlucky throw. This may be due to a three, four and six on the dice. When that happens, you hear shouts of pleasure. Every man laughs and is happy about it. Then there is delight and no cries. Those who come first are likely to get copper, and those who are last get just rocks. Of course, many are afraid of this. Anyone who wants to know and ask more about it may find his way to Stora Kopparberg at New Year, as said above.¹⁶

Here, Gisle Jacobson mentions something called the pair line, and assumes that even a reader who does not come from Falun and Stora Kopparberg understands what this means. The term was used to denote the order in which the mining teams took turns to break ore in the mine. The author explains that if one gets a high score at the gambling game, it meant a good position in this order, while a low number gives a bad position. If one threw three dice simultaneously, the lowest number one could get was 1:1:1, that is, three; followed by 1:1:2, which gave four; 1:2:2 five and so on, and the highest number in this regard was 6:6:6, that is, 18. The miners played this game in order to decide the mining order and allotment of the ore, and as a result every mining team's success or failure, profit or loss or, in the worst case, death. It was impossible to know in advance where and when the rich ore would reveal itself, and when and where a devastating and deadly mine collapse would happen in connection with the different shifts. Thus, the right order and a good position in the mine were often of life-changing importance.

To understand Gisle Jacobson's oracle gaming text and dice fortune books (*Würfellosbücher*) in general, the relation between oracles and gaming, which is quite complex, has to be considered. Through the ages, gaming seems to be a constant activity but has been valued differently. The joy in being able to forget oneself and time in order to relax in an apparently goalless activity, which at the same time was its goal, is as tempting now as it was 5000 years ago. During the Middle Ages and the early modern period, rich and poor, nobles and clerics alike, gambled. Medieval sources talk of the large sums of money the rich nobles or

16 "WJd kopparbergz Gruffua plågar wara wijs/ Der af Berkmännen bäre både äre och prijs/ Nyårs tidh medh try Terningar att kasta/ Det til hwar Berksman moste sigh hasta/ Den högste ögon på try Terningar kan få/ Han får fremst j par gongen gå/ Och haffuer en fördel/ fram för andra/ Som länger åther j gongen monde wandra/ Men den som j rumpan kommer/ han sitter der fast/ Det waller hans ringa och arma kast/ Try es fyra eller sex ögon kunne det göra/ När det skeer/ skal man glädie höra/ Hwar man skratta och lee der ååt/ Då är lust och glädie och ingen grååt/ Den fremst kommer får för kopper än den eftrest malm/ Derföre gör det mongen stor ångest och harm/ Den vidare her om wil wetta och fråga/ Han må sigh hijt til kopparberget wåga/ Nyårs tidh som förre är sacht" (D2^v–3^r).

church leaders wagered, even if gambling was forbidden for churchmen. Games of chance particularly were considered to be an inappropriate diversion for monks and priests, as well as for women and children. From the perspective of medieval moralists, gambling and above all games of chance were linked to a catalogue of sins which was repeated constantly over many centuries. Gambling was associated with behaviour unfit for Christians, like swearing, lying and cheating.¹⁷ But even evil acts like violent behaviour, gambling addiction, whoring, drinking and ruthless enrichment were considered as the bad deeds seen to be promoted by games of chance and dice. Moralists of the time and the authorities were quite simply worried about the extent to which the gamblers, with their sinful behavior, jeopardized the salvation of their souls. But gambling and games of chance also worked as a relaxing activity in an environment characterized by a dangerous and often life-threatening existence, especially for miners. For them, games of chance meant the possibility of quick riches and a way out of an often poor existence, although the chances of success were insignificant, and the risk of being cheated and losing hung over one.¹⁸

The function of throwing lots as an aid in difficult and complex decisions is an old and well-documented custom. What is classical in a literary historical context is Augustine's (354–430) famous conversion scene from his autobiographical book *Confessions* (*Confessiones*) where a decision, resting on chance, was the beginning of a religious conversion situation. Certain forms of lottery oracle were accepted; above all, when they made decisions easier or could decide and settle conflicts. In the Bible, casting lots are only talked about positively in connection with important decisions.¹⁹ *Dobblet vid gruvstugan* is a medieval custom which also continued after the Swedes went over to the Lutheran faith, even though Luther clearly did not like the Bible's view of lotteries, especially the passages mentioning priests using them.²⁰ His dislike of the lottery relates to the church's negative attitude to gambling in general, and dice games in particular.²¹ Obviously, he did not distinguish between the lottery as organized decision-making and games of chance. The dice were used for both, and the line between them was not always easy to determine. However, the Church was convinced of the dice's negative effect on people. The propaganda of late medieval moralists against gambling, and above all dice games was extensive, and it was argued that the dice had been invented by

17 "According to religious commentators, the gambler was an exemplar of an immoral man, prone to blasphemy, idolatry and superstition," Walker 1999, 42; Schwerhoff 1995. See Ariès 2008, 11 for the problem of dying while playing a popular game. See also Ariès 2008, 69 for the Church's prohibition of dancing and gaming in the cemetery.

18 On cheating and gaming from a historical perspective, see Mehl 1981, and on dice games Tauber 1987. On the way a sinful player had the right to a church burial, see Ariès 2008, 11.

19 Mann 1994.

20 In Luther's own translation, lottery is therefore deleted from the context; Mann 1994, 51, esp. footnote 11.

21 Nedoma 2007.

the devil himself.²² Neither Luther's negative attitude to lotteries nor the generally negative attitude of the time against gaming and dice had any significant effect on the miners' custom. The advantages of this practice were probably decisive; enabling the miner to make decisions in accordance with God's will and by this means ensuring success in the mine and at the same time avoiding arguments. That must have been the reason for the custom continuing uninterrupted until the early eighteenth century at Stora Kopparberg.

Copper Mining and Risk-taking during the Early Modern Period

Sweden's dominant role in Europe during the seventeenth century would have been difficult to finance without copper, one of the most important metal resources in the country. So much of this metal was mined that it is estimated that Sweden produced almost two-thirds of the world's copper during this time. Iron certainly also had an important bearing on metal exports, but copper production had one decisive advantage: unlike iron production, which was spread over the whole of mid-Sweden, all the copper came from the large mine in Falun. The growth and success of its mining company, *Stora Kopparbergs Bergslag*, goes hand in hand with Sweden's era as a great power, and has imprinted itself on the people and landscape in and around Falun for hundreds of years.²³ During the seventeenth century, Falun was one of Sweden's most important and most populated cities, and the mine was by far the biggest employer with distinctive pre-industrial forms.²⁴ The price which the population in general and, above all, the working force at the mine paid was high. Countless collapses and accidents that took place in connection with the dangerous work killed and injured numerous miners.²⁵

Several contemporary sources illustrate the people's living and working conditions in and around the Falun mine during the early modern period. In 1555, the Swedish bishop Olaus Magnus Gothus (1490–1557) wrote a comprehensive work in Latin, *History of the Northern Peoples (Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus)*, which is a unique depiction of the life of people in the North during the sixteenth century. Mining was already an important industrial source, and in the sixth book of his work, which comprised 22 books, he describes the risks of the work under the title *On mines and mining (De mineris et metallis)*. He sees the mines as prison camps in which the workers carried out their daily work under horrible conditions.

22 On the devil as the inventor of dice, see Mehl 1990, 314; Also in Tauber 1987, 11. "Just as God invented the twenty-one letters of the alphabet, so the Devil invented the dice, on which he placed twenty-one points." G. de Barletta quoted in Purdie 2000, 178.

23 Boëthius 1951. Heckscher 1968, 102–104; Hildebrand 1946, 432–439.

24 Boëthius 1965; Lindroth 1955, "Bornsbrukstiden".

25 Lindroth 1955, "Gruvans historia".

Miners could be “suddenly buried under stone blocks or suffocated by the fumes and the smoke and pitifully die in the middle of their work, or the trains break down and they would be suffocated in the middle of a shaft.” He mentions that only through “the defying of endless dangers and the wasting of countless human lives, could one gain entrance into the inner bowels of the mountain, Pluto’s abode.”²⁶

Drawing a parallel between contemporary literary descriptions of the underground kingdom of Hades and work in the mines is a *topos* that is often used in connection with depictions of mining. A prominent source from the first half of the seventeenth century which describes the Falun copper mine in more depth is a travel report by a French diplomat by the name of Charles Ogier (1595–1654), who travelled in the Nordic countries and in particular in Sweden during 1634–1635 to guard French interests throughout the on-going war. The travel report he wrote in Latin was published in diary form under the title *Carolii Ogierii ephemerides sive iter Danicum, Svecicum, Polonicum* in 1656. The Swedish part of his journey is an often cited source to illustrate Sweden when it was a world power.²⁷ He compares the work in the Falun mine to Virgil’s description of Aeneas’ visit to the underworld:

Nor is anything [than this] more appropriate to exemplify the underworld depicted by Virgil. Here are both Sisyphus and Ixion amply represented: you see some toppling stone blocks, others turning wheels, and yet more doing other heavy and awkward work, as a kind of punishment for their sins.²⁸

Similar thoughts were expressed by Carl von Linné (1707–1778) in his description of the Falun mine in connection with a journey to Dalarna at the beginning of the 1770s. In the text, *Iter Dalekarlicum*, he compares the interior of the mine to both Hades and the Christian Hell: there is a “poisonous, pungent sulphurous smoke which poisons the air far around, so that you cannot go there without courage. It corrodes the earth, so that no plant may grow.”²⁹ During the 1980s, another manuscript was discovered in the Vatican library by the aforementioned Charles Ogier, which contains a comprehensive description of his visit to the silver mine in Sala and the copper mine in Falun. The description gives a vivid picture of work in the Falun mine during the seventeenth century:³⁰

So the one who in his understanding wanted to search for a picture of this mine may imagine a dark hole, horrible, deep [...] vaulted artfully in different directions, which was kept up by nothing other than itself, full of lighted fires in different places, full of smoke and sulphur and metallic smells, full of dripping water; in the bowels of the earth black

26 Olaus Magnus 2010 (1555), book VI, quotation on 268. All translations from original texts by the author.

27 Ogier 1914 (1656). See also Appelgren’s annotated edition, Ogier 1978 (1656).

28 Ogier 1978 (1656), 72.

29 Linné 1953, 148.

30 Wis 1988.

people like little devils, the noise of hammers and iron spikes which broke the stone, the cries of the miners from those who work transporting the ore to baskets, and finally the destruction and noise that can arise if such terrible and heavy work rages.³¹



Picture 3. Hans Ranie's mine map of Stora Kopparberget from 1683 depicts a mining accident. The risks of the job and the proximity of death made miners turn to divination by dicing.

The historian Sten Lindroth characterises the work at the Falun mine during the early modern period in the following way:

Mining was always something of a hazard, sometimes fortune smiled, new rich deposits were brought to light and production improved, sometimes the better veins ran out or landslips and the ravages of water prevented access to the ore, and less copper was produced. Such more or less random factors, actual conditions at the mine, have above all been crucial for the size of copper production.³²

³¹ Wis 1988, 10.

³² Lindroth 1955, 56. This and other translations mine unless otherwise indicated.

What Lindroth comprehends as “random factors” was given a different significance by people during the early modern period, and illustrates the miners’ attitude not only to chance but also to luck and profit, accident and death. Sudden reversals in connection with success or failure in mining have been hasty and unpredictable throughout the centuries. However, people did not speak about chance, seeing a connection between mystical powers and the profitability of the mine. Mining was dangerous and cruel, with constant unexpected cave-ins and death near at hand, which inclined people to trust to higher powers or various forms of superstition. Contemporary documents illustrate that people during those times attributed random incidents to divine intention or the work of supernatural powers.³³

From this perspective, it seems logical to believe that it is possible to affect this intention or power; for example, through magical or religious practices. People had another conception of events that we would today attribute to chance during the Middle Ages and into the early modern period, one which in its allegorical form is called Lady Luck. The Latin name *fortuna* really only means happiness, but it includes both happiness and the lack of it, and thereby meant both good and bad luck.³⁴ During the seventeenth century, Lady Luck was still seen as a “raging, shameless lady” and was generally depicted as a woman standing on a wheel which symbolizes the abrupt shifts in happiness.³⁵

Mining documents from that period illustrate how people had a quite clear awareness of when they were actually putting themselves at risk with the aim of making a profit. The first regulated safety measures on the part of the Board of Mining (*Bergskollegiet*) take shape at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Board of Mining was a central agency which worked between 1637 and 1857, with responsibility for directing and controlling the mining industry in Sweden. What we today call risk insight became fully developed and distinctive during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Today, we make a clear distinction between risk and danger. The question of whether an action is risky or dangerous is answered by the one carrying it out. If you are aware of the damage which can happen in connection with a certain action, you are in a risky situation. In a dangerous situation, on the other hand, you are unaware of the danger. We take a risk when we know that an unforeseen event can take place, and can even calculate the risk of a particular action.³⁶ The term risk came into use during the fifteenth century in Italy in maritime trade where it was applied in connection with the maritime insurance system.

33 This is further discussed in Ridder 2013a.

34 Savin investigates the concept of *fortuna* in Sweden during older times, pointing out that a similar sense of the Latin word *fortuna* is also implicit in “the Swedish term *lycka* which in older times played an important role in people’s understanding of the world, life and themselves,” Savin 2011, 11.

35 Jesaias Rompler von Löwenhalt (1605–ca. 1672) quoted in Krause 2010, 1.

36 Luhmann 1991. For a smoker, cancer is a clear risk when lighting a cigarette. On the other hand, a non-smoker who comes in contact with smoke is rather in a dangerous situation than a risky one.

When risk was dealt with rationally, a mathematical calculation of risk followed, and theories of probability were developed during the seventeenth century.³⁷

In a world where everything is preordained by God, on the other hand, no probability calculations are needed, and the relation between risk and danger therefore lead directly or indirectly to the problem of the world's absolute randomness, or contingency. A possible reaction is that people tried to protect themselves against risky situations by dealing with them in some way; that is, they expected contingent events instead of passively letting God's providence decide the outcome of a dangerous situation. How the miners at the Stora Kopparberg dealt with and related to this problem will now be described in detail.

Oracles and Other Apotropaic Practices

Throughout all times and in all cultures, people have tried various forms of prediction and strategies to affect fate. Divinatory acts were supposed to influence instances which were thought to have an impact on one's own fate; for example, spirits, demons and ancestors. Lottery oracles belong to the same research area as magic rituals, and when I talk about magic here, I mean from a general perspective "a system of conceptions and attitudes that aim to place the visible everyday world in relation to a space outside this world."³⁸

Oracles and oracle games are considered to be a kind of medieval and late medieval everyday magic and superstition, and oracle literature is one of humankind's oldest literary genres. An oracle has two main functions, to see into the future, and to help with decision-making, which is principally based on predictions about the future.³⁹ During the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the borders between magical thinking, alchemy and medicine were flexible, and the popular medical texts of the time often contain various hybrid forms. A magical worldview characterized human thinking, and was weakened only in connection with the rise of experimental science. In the framework of a magical worldview, there is no chance. Nothing happens without there being a meaning, God's plan, or at least the intention expressed by some form of higher power. Simple and unassuming events were interpreted in a larger context, the throw of a dice, or the dealing of cards, as much as the flight patterns of birds or patterns in coffee dregs. Fateful events like war and disease or storms and death were also understood as a part of a larger plan of action and salvation.⁴⁰ At the end of the sixteenth century in Sweden, the new Lutheran faith was declared in the entire country, and the Church

³⁷ Hahn 1998.

³⁸ Definition according to Dillinger 2007, 13.

³⁹ In this context, alchemy is sympathetic: the sympathetic effect of different materials and things, an in-vogue term from the turn of the eighteenth century, in the sense of "with each other in a secret relation".

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the Swedish view, see Sandén 2010, 97, 104.

fought against anything perceived as belonging to Catholic doctrine. The Lutheran Church counted not only the old Catholic rites but also blessings, spells or magical acts as Catholic doctrine.⁴¹ The magical exercises and their function normally aimed to resolve and above all deal with both practical and existential problems.⁴²

Therefore, during the late Middle Ages, magic was not prohibited in principle, but only the form called black magic or wizardry, which was about hurting people by using sorcery. In Germany, for example, only someone who hurt others by black magic (*Schadenzauber*) incurred the death penalty. Those who could not be proved to have used some kind of black magic or *maleficium* would be treated as charlatans instead. In another legal context, someone who had clearly benefited from someone else through magic (this could relate to curing someone who was sick or protecting crops through magical means) could be exempt from legal consequences.⁴³ In Sweden, however, any form of witchcraft was considered a crime in the late sixteenth century.⁴⁴

The miners' exposure to danger can be compared to another social group with similar circumstances, that is, soldiers. Soldiers in seventeenth-century Germany tried to prevent a quick death on the battlefield by magical procedures. One example of this magical thinking is the so-called "*Passauer Kunst*", a superstition that was intended to make soldiers invulnerable on the battlefield. Why it is called the *Passauer Kunst* is not clear, but it has been suggested that the name is linked to a hangman from the town of Passau who about 1611 made notes with secret signs on them that he sold to soldiers. The soldiers sewed the notes into their uniforms or ate them which, according to legend made them "frozen" or "stuck" as it was called in German (*Festmachen*, that is, stick, stick on), invulnerable and protected against wounds by gunshot, cutting or stabbing. The *Passauer Kunst* became a widespread superstition among German soldiers during the Thirty Years' War, since it was rumoured that the notes from the hangman in Passau really worked.⁴⁵

In the same way as soldiers during the Thirty Years' War tried to protect themselves from death through magic, miners also practised various so-called *apotropaic* rituals. The Greek word *apotrépein*, meaning "to ward off", forms the basis of the term, which is used in research on religion to describe magic rituals to prevent accidents and death. These magic rituals are symbolic rites which work, in a modern way of speaking, as preventers of accidents. These include amulets, oracles, inscriptions and so on. In Swedish mining history and above all at Stora Kopparberget, miners observe a particular attitude to different types of mountain

41 For a further discussion about the view on magic and magical practices during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Sweden, see Oja 1999 and Lindstedt Cronberg 2010.

42 Knoblauch 1996, 226. For a further discussion of the characteristics of a magical worldview, see Birkhan 2010, chapter II.

43 Funke 2009, 18.

44 Oja 1999, 62–70.

45 Funke 2009. Also compare other superstitious practices that soldiers were devoted to.

spirits, both when they were inside and outside the mine. Correct behaviour on the part of the miner, characterized by respect for these spirits, would increase the chance of surviving this work and not being taken by a sudden and unpredictable death.⁴⁶ Sten Lindroth writes of the miners' piety and superstition that in "the continent's mines a distinctive mountain religion coloured by mysticism played a very substantial role. Our own miners used to content themselves with placing their work under the Lord's protection based on their evangelical faith, without further comment."⁴⁷

The quote reminds us of Luther's advice to soldiers facing their dangerous work and how he addresses their superstitious attitude. In *Ob Kriegsleute auch in seligem Stande sein können* (*How soldiers can enter a state of mercy*) from 1526, he deals with the question of whether participation in war can be united with a Christian conscience. Luther, who was really against the idea of a holy war, accepted it in cases where soldiers were defending their own country. He certainly rejected every form of idolatry as sinful behaviour, but included the idea that the superstitions of soldiers served the Christian need to ward off danger. Otherwise, he recommended saying one *Credo* and one Lord's Prayer, but then to give body and soul to God, an attitude which seems similar to the "resolute evangelical faith" of the miners which Lindroth speaks of.⁴⁸

Numerous forms of apotropaic rites and divination practices were therefore public property during older times. They were comprehensive and widespread among different population groups and social strata. People used blessed hosts as frequently as spices or bible texts in various material forms. Amulets were in use in the same way as prayers or spells for specific purposes and situations, and formed part of everyday magic and folk piety. A clear difference between folk medicine and experimental science started to take shape during the seventeenth century, although one must imagine this as an elitist mindset during this time. Distinguishing between the natural world and the supernatural, superstitious ones was an attitude found among few enlightened learned people. At the same time, one is able to observe an increased production of texts like witchcraft books and similar magical instructions throughout the second half of the seventeenth century.⁴⁹

Mining was seen as a risky venture in all ages. Sometimes rich new seams were found which could support the miners for some time, and then their income was very good. But quite often contemporary literature bears witness to dry seams, mine collapses or water ravages which prevented the retrieval of ore, so that miners produced much less. Copper ore mining could even become unprofitable during

46 Åmark 1951; Tillhagen 1988. For the prohibition of swearing in the mine, see Kristiansson 1996, 24.

47 Lindroth 1955, 202.

48 Luther 1982, 220. On Luther's view of soldiers' superstitions, see Funke 2009, 20. On the expected negative attitudes of Protestants and above all Swedes as apotropaic rites in the form of the *Passauer Kunst* during the Thirty Years' War, see Funke 2009, 22, 29.

49 Daxelmüller 1996.

certain periods and consequently shut down. The general opinion was that chance had nothing to do with people's opportunities to find treasure in the earth. The common understanding was that the conditions for making significant finds were entirely dependent on God's providence and merciful intervention. It was important not to ascribe success to one's own wisdom. Believing that one could find God's gifts based on one's own power would have been seen as vanity, a dangerous trait, since signs of arrogance could be expected to be incur punishment by God with accidents and death. If unforeseen rich ore deposits were found, it is carefully pointed out in the old sources that the find was owing to "God's strange blessing was detected in Stora Kopparberg Mine."⁵⁰ Many superstitious practices are linked to ore finds. In Germany, for example, you meet a distinctive, mystical mountain religion. According to old folk beliefs, the mountain's evil powers would guard its, and would pre-ordain which families and which generations would make certain finds. If the wrong person made the find, things would go badly and, not infrequently, death was a common penalty. The same holds if the finder is not secretive about the find for a determined period, as the powers demand. If a lode is about to be exhausted, it is usually explained by sinful or unworthy behaviour having affected the higher powers. It is frequently argued that the finds "become unfruitful" because of "people's vices".⁵¹

The general understanding was, therefore, that fate was predetermined by God's providence. The idea of accident, sickness or war being God's retribution and punishment for man's sins is deeply rooted in contemporary thinking.⁵² If things were going well for the people, it was a sign of their virtuous lives, while happiness was God's reward for this effort. If things went badly or people were struck by misadventures, accidents and death, it was a direct result of living sinfully. But even a person in the seventeenth century must have had a perception of the omnipotence of chance, especially if they were involved in mining in some way.

The history of the Falun mine bears witness to the countless attempts to seek the possibility of a good ore find, of how capricious happiness was, and how quickly a find could be mined out. The seventeenth century has been characterized in Swedish mining history research as "the century of great collapses" as regards mining labour at Stora Kopparberget. They point to the frequent collapses and continuous accidents which, especially at that time, cost the lives and health of so many miners.⁵³ In comparison to Germany, for example, one observes that mining in Sweden was not characterized by the same safety measures. Rammelsberg is a mine near the town of Goslar in the German region called the Harz in Lower Saxony. This mine was an important medieval German copper mine and was

⁵⁰ Lindroth 1955, 204.

⁵¹ Söderberg 1932, 15.

⁵² Sandén 2010, 104.

⁵³ Lindroth 1955, 103.

in many respects a role model for Stora Kopparberget.⁵⁴ While in Rammelsberg they built strong shoring to prevent collapses to a far greater extent, in the Falun mine they contented themselves with simple tunnels and rooms that were seldom even equipped with timbering. This is related to the location of the deposit in Falun where, unlike Rammelsberg, it is not located within a mountain but could only be reached from above, so it was not possible to build shafts from the side of the mountain, into the deposit. Instead the miners worked open cast, which was then dug down. After that, they worked inwards under great roofs which were widened into great constructions to extract as much ore as possible. Leaving pillars and walls behind from a safety standpoint in such a situation was never really consistently done. When the mine was once again affected by excessive collapses during the seventeenth century because of this thoughtlessness, people started to complain about their ancestors' lack of care of the mine. It was as late as the beginning of the seventeenth century that the first ordinance on mine safety came, recommending more thoroughly planned mining operations. Although these safety measures were soon adopted and carried out, the lack of care of the ancestors could not be undone in time.

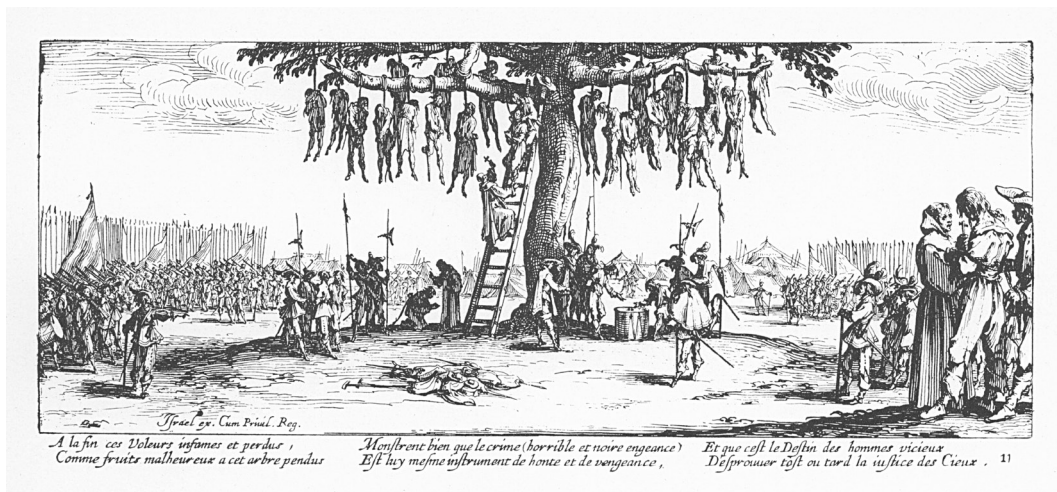
During this time, people obviously had an appreciation of risk, even if they did not use that word, talking instead about “hazard” in risky or dangerous contexts, a word taken from the gaming background. The rooms that were especially risky to work in were called “hazardous” (*hazardelige*) chambers, where work was forbidden by the Board of Mining because of the impending risk of collapses. The question of whether the mine should be secured with walls or by timbering was also discussed at length. The general position was that the latter “would put the whole mine in jeopardy” (*satte hele grufvan i hassard*) because of the fire risk from wooden constructions. Severe punishments were handed out to miners who were guilty of sloppy work which could put the whole mining operation at risk, for example, irresponsibility with fire. The threat of punishment hung heavily over the person who fell into the temptation to break the rich ore clearly visible in the safety supports left behind.⁵⁵

54 For a discussion about the connection between Rammelsberg and Stora Kopparberg, see Ridder 2014, 256. Rammelsberg as a role model for Stora Kopparberg, see Söderberg 1932, 59. For the mining history of Rammelsberg, see, for example, Kraschewski 1997 and Liessmann 2010, with further references.

55 Boëthius 1951, 376–377.

Conclusion: Dicing towards Death

During older times, ecclesiastical jurisdiction, just like secular courts, used dice for judging where a life was at stake in various situations,⁵⁶ as well as for resolving contention and disputes. In Swedish, we know of the words *decimate* and *decimation*, which are related to the Latin word for ten, *decem*. Decimation originally denotes a military punishment frequently used in the Roman army on military units that had been guilty of mutiny or cowardice before the enemy. In order not to execute the whole unit and thereby weaken the army, they chose to execute every tenth man by letting the lottery decide who would die. *Decimatio* as a punishment was used in exceptional cases, and primarily when it was impossible to find out whom in a group was responsible for a reprehensible act. Sometimes the lottery was used to choose every twentieth (*vicesimatio*) or every hundredth (*centesimatio*) soldier for the death penalty, and the others were punished more leniently. To maintain discipline, particularly in connection with mutiny or revolt, this punishment was also used in war-related situations after Roman times, and is also known in the Swedish military history context. Gustav Adolf decreed decimation as the punishment for desertion or the like in the Articles of War from 15 July 1621 (article 74). This punishment was probably used even earlier in Sweden.⁵⁷



Picture 4. One of the most famous depictions of the horrors of the Thirty Years' War come from Jacques Callot (1592–1635). His series *Les Misères et les Malheurs de la Guerre* ("The Miseries and Misfortunes of War") include "The Hanging", the punishment of the unruly soldiers who had terrorised the civilian population.

The dice worked as an instrument for setting the level of punishment, which is also documented in legal documents from medieval German towns. The delinquent could throw three dice, and their score decided how great the punishment would

⁵⁶ See Whitman 2008, chapter I, about the role of chance in connection with easing the judge's sense of moral responsibility, especially when it comes to the decision to execute someone.

⁵⁷ On decimation in Sweden, see Wedberg 1935.

be.⁵⁸ In Sweden, civil courts used dice and lotteries to decide who was guilty of murder and assault where several perpetrators were involved during the early modern period up until the nineteenth century. If the suspects blamed one another and it was impossible to decide who had done what, the dice decided the matter.⁵⁹ People's attitudes during the early modern period were characterized by an Old Testament attitude that throws of the dice were a way of letting God judge. They referred to lotteries as divine judgement, preferably with a link to the mottos of the Book of Proverbs (16:33): "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is the Lord's alone."⁶⁰

After the Enlightenment, the attitude to this method started to change. Certainly, gambling on life and death continued; it was however no longer literally referred to as God's will being discovered through the dice, but rather to "the love of human life." If the court did not know which of two suspects was guilty of murder or assault on someone, and both blamed one another, the recommendation was to let the dice decide the matter. The general understanding was that it was more humane to let the dice decide, since murder only demanded the execution of a single person as retribution, not the death of both suspects.⁶¹

Chance was functionalized with the help of dice, not only in connection with justice. And in many ways, a successful approach to avoiding arguments and conflicts has apparently been to make use of a ritualized form of dice game. *Dobblet vid gruvstugan* at Stora Kopparberg was one way of making important decisions which otherwise would cause conflicts among the miners.⁶² They joined together after the New Year before the mining court, threw three dice, calculated the score, and made a list in which the order of the different mining gangs was related to the score. The team that got the highest score had first access to the first mining chamber. The team with the next highest score got the second mining room, and so on. The success or adversity of every team, the triumph or failure of every miner, and in some cases accident and death, could in this way be attributed to God's justice, and not be blamed on a single person who had drawn up a particular roster. At this meeting, they also put the teams together in order to prevent any destructive group formation.⁶³

In Gisle Jacobson's oracle book, *A small pastime*, the miner's dice game is the basis for letting the player/reader draw lots. One cannot know with certainty whether the book only had an entertainment purpose or if there were more serious intentions on the part of either the writer or miners regarding this game and the

58 Tauber 1987, 29.

59 Wedberg 1935; Nilson 1997.

60 Wedberg 1935, 26.

61 Wedberg 1935, 26.

62 For the way in which conflicts negatively affected the result of mining during this time, see Ridder 2014, 256.

63 Ridder 2013b, 326.

oracle associated with this practice. Thinking of the dangerous work of the miners and the necessarily related feelings of anxiety and insecurity, the divine events associated with such a book can help – either in jest or seriously – to manage the individual crisis every miner found himself in.

The book was published around 70 years before the greatest collapse occurred in the mine in the year 1689. The decade before was characterized by the Board of Mining's attempt to get the more and more frequent collapses under control. The miners were well aware of the neglect of mountain safety by previous generations, and they must have seen working under such conditions as a massive threat to their lives and health. This feeling of powerlessness and helplessness has traditionally led to people seeking help from magical strategies to channel their anxiety, and above all to increase their chances of survival. The haphazardness of the throw of the dice was functionalized at Stora Kopparberg in order to avoid quarrels, and thereby increase the profit of the mine. It also helped to allocate the risk of dying and the prospect of becoming rich equally between the miners. Making use of dice rolls in such a situation appears to be an attempt to avoid chance, but from a modern perspective and considering the fact of contingency, it is more like a densification of it. Miners used dice because they were afraid of chance; they used them as a sort of rescue attempt to protect them from chance and to keep some kind of illusion of autonomy in the face of the haphazardness of death.

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“To Help the Deceased Guild Brother to His Grave”: Guilds, Death and Funeral Arrangements in Late Medieval and Early Modern Norway, ca. 1300–1900

Håkon Haugland

University of Bergen

This article examines the help the medieval guilds and the early modern craft guilds in Norway could provide when their members died, and how the Reformation of 1536 changed the extent of this help. For the medieval period, the paper discusses the funeral arrangements in urban guilds and rural guilds. For the early modern period, the discussion is limited to the towns, since few, if any rural guilds survived the Reformation.

The essay argues that aid to deceased members was essential both to the medieval guilds and the craft guilds that were founded after the Reformation, thus stressing a greater degree of continuity between the medieval guilds and the post-Reformation craft guilds than previous Norwegian research has claimed. The social and religious functions, exemplified by the funeral arrangements, were essential to the early modern craft guilds, as they were in the medieval guilds. Furthermore, there was a continuity in form in the various elements of which the help to the deceased consisted, including being with the dying in his last hours, waking over him, eating and drinking in his honour, following him in a procession to his grave and providing economic support for his funeral. However, the Reformation also constituted a major change, as guild chantries were confiscated, doctrine of purgatory was abolished, the masses for the deceased prohibited and intercession for the deceased made obsolete. Thus, the guilds that survived the Reformation and the new craft guilds that were founded afterward were forced to shift the focus of their help from the intercession for the dead to give them an honourable funeral. A second shift came after the craft guild reforms in the 1680s and 1690s, when attempts were made to limit the extent and the splendour of the funeral processions, and attendance at guild members' funerals were made optional. This led to the decline of the communal funeral and the privatisation of the Lutheran funeral ritual. Still, one aspect of the help, the financial support for their members' funerals, continued to be important right up to the dissolution of the Norwegian craft guilds in 1869.

Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen (eds.)
Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

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Introduction: The Two Wills of Jochym Gherken

On 22 July 1527, Jochym Gherken, a *Bergenfahrer*¹ merchant and member of the Lübeck town council, met with the town scribe Jakob Dus in the town hall. Gherken, perhaps worried about death or being ill, wanted to make the necessary preparations for his own death, and met with Dus to have his will written down.² In his will, which still exists, Gherken bequeathed gifts to his family, friends, various churches, hospitals, monasteries, convents and guilds in Lübeck. However, being a *Bergenfahrer* merchant Gherken had strong ties to the Norwegian town of Bergen. Gherken had come to Bergen from Lübeck as a young boy to be trained in the stock-fish trade at the Hanseatic *Cunthor* in Bergen.³ A few decades later, he returned to Lübeck and established himself there as a *Bergenfahrer* merchant, becoming a member of the town's *Bergenfahrer* guild,⁴ and owning a *staven* or trading company in Bergen which was run on his behalf by his deputy and junior partner, Marten Elers.⁵ Gherken's ties with Bergen are evident in his will through numerous bequeaths to persons and institutions, including Elers, several churches, monasteries and convents, the two poorhouses of St. George and St. Catherine, and two guilds, the Corpus Christi guild, and the St. Catherine's and St. Dorothy's guild, where, according to the will, he was still a member.

Sixteen years later, on 18 November 1543, the year before he died, Gherken, now the town mayor, had his will written down for a second time.⁶ As in his first will, he made bequests to his family and friends in Lübeck and Bergen and the two poor houses in Bergen. However, no gifts were given to churches, convents or monasteries in the two towns, nor were there given any gifts to any guilds in the two towns.

The reason for this was the Reformation. Introduced to Lübeck in 1530 and to Denmark-Norway in 1536, the Lutheran Reformation marked a shift from a late medieval Catholic culture of death to an early modern Lutheran culture of death in Northern Europe. The late medieval culture of death was marked by the doctrine of purgatory and the belief that the living could intercede for the deceased, either by praying and singing masses for their souls or by buying letters of indulgence,

1 *Bergenfahrer* was the common term for Hanseatic merchants that traded with the Norwegian town of Bergen, Bruns 1900.

2 The will was published by Friedrich Bruns in 1900, Bruns 1900, 150, no. 229. The original will is kept in the City Archives of Lübeck, Germany, Archive der Hansestadt Lübeck, Testamente 1527 Juli 22.

3 The *Cunthor* was the Hanseatic merchants' guild in Bergen. See Helle 1982; Haugland 2006; Haugland 2012.

4 The *Bergenfahrer* guild in Lübeck is first mentioned in 1393, Bruns 1900, XX, CXI–CXII.

5 For more on the *Bergenfahrer* merchants and their trading companies, see Bruns 1900; Helle 1982, 738–740.

6 Archive der Hansestadt Lübeck, Germany, Testamente 1543 Nov. 18.

both of which could shorten a soul's time in the purgatory. The masses for the dead and the letters of indulgence, based on the doctrine of purgatory, linked what the American scholar Craig M. Koslofsky has called the late medieval economy of salvation to the material economy of money, goods and services.⁷

This is clearly seen in the many preserved wills and deeds of gift from the late medieval period, including Gherken's first will from 1527, where money and landed property were given to the churches, monasteries, convents and guilds, which in turn could offer prayers and masses for the release of the donor's soul from purgatory. The Reformation radically changed this. Martin Luther (1483–1546) and the other early reformers, teaching a new doctrine of salvation by faith alone, rejected the Church doctrine of purgatory as well as the belief that the living could intercede for the dead, stating that such intercession was neither needed nor possible.⁸ The rejection of purgatory was followed by laws prohibiting the practices associated with it, including vigils, masses for the dead and letters of indulgence. Furthermore, Church property was confiscated, including chantries and the landed property belonging to them, convents and monasteries were dissolved, and guilds were prohibited. This had huge consequences for the economy of salvation and its institutions, as the testators were no longer allowed to donate money or landed property in exchange for the reading of masses for their souls. The institutions on their side were either no longer allowed to offer such services, as was the case with the churches, or they were dissolved, as was the case with the convents, monasteries and guilds.

This explains why Gherken had his will made for the second time. Having converted to Protestantism, Gherken no longer needed to make bequests to religious institutions to be certain of salvation, nor was he allowed to do so. Furthermore, many of the institutions he had bequeathed goods to in 1527, including the Corpus Christi guild and the St. Catherine and St. Dorothy's guild in Bergen, no longer existed.⁹

Gercken's two wills demonstrate quite clearly the religious and social consequences of the Reformation. This paper will focus on some of these, notably the changes made to the funeral ritual, from the perspective of the guilds in Norway, of which Gherken's first will mentioned two, the Corpus Christi guild and the St. Catherine and St. Dorothy's guild in Bergen. The first guilds in Norway were probably founded in the twelfth century, and they flourished in the late medieval period.¹⁰

Founded by people from different social layers of the Norwegian medieval society, and for a whole range of different purposes, the Norwegian guilds still had

7 See Koslofsky 2005, 11.

8 Koslofsky 2005, 2.

9 Haugland 2006.

10 Haugland 2012, 39–70.

important features in common, features they also shared with guilds in other parts of Western Europe. As pointed out by the German historian Otto Gerhard Oexle, the guilds were sworn communities. When founding a guild, all the members had sworn an oath, promising to follow a set of common norms or rules, which often were written down at a later stage (guild statutes), and to help and to protect each other. Whenever newcomers were admitted as members, they had to swear the same oath. The sworn community of the guild was often expressed through the language of ritual kinship; the members were called brothers and sisters, and the guild as a whole was often called a *fraternitas*, brotherhood.¹¹ The sworn bonds between the members was further strengthened by regular gatherings at which the members met to eat, drink and pray together, in Norwegian guild statutes usually called *gildedrikk* or *stæfni* (meeting) and held in a guild hall, the house of the master of the guild or in houses rented for the occasion.¹²

Finally, all guilds were religious communities. Fundamental to all were what Oexle calls *fraternitas* as a norm, to treat each other as brothers, a norm rooted in Christian ethics. Furthermore, most guilds had their own patron saint, and the religious activities of a guild were in part associated with the cult of the saint. They often held their guild gatherings at their patron saint's feasts, arranged and took part in processions venerating their patron saints, and founded chantries to their honour in churches, monasteries and convents.¹³

Because of their close relation to the Catholic Church, the Norwegian guilds, like guilds elsewhere in Northern Europe, came under attack from the new Lutheran state, resulting in the dissolution of most of the urban and rural guilds that had been founded for religious purposes (often called *confraternities*). Still, some Norwegian craft guilds and the Hanseatic merchant guild in Bergen, which in addition to their religious and social functions also had occupational and economic functions, continued to exist after the Reformation.¹⁴

Thus, the Reformation marked a change, both when it came to the number of guilds, their functions, and their importance in society as a whole. However, expressions of continuity between the medieval and the early modern period could be found. This continuity is first and foremost reflected in the guilds that survived the Reformation, but, and this is perhaps more surprising, it is also reflected in the arrangements for helping living and deceased members. Central to the medieval guild was mutual aid. The extent of this varied from guild to guild, but it was customary to help sick, poor and deceased members. Similar provisions are also found in preserved craft guild statutes from early modern Norway.

11 Oexle 1985; Oexle 1998. For more on ritual kinship in guilds, see Terpstra (ed.) 2000.

12 Bisgaard 2001, 83–103; Haugland 2012, 145–178.

13 Oexle 1998; Anz 1998, 13–15; Bisgaard 2001; Haugland 2012.

14 For more on the guilds and the Reformation in England, see Crouch 2000; Duffy 2005; in Germany, see Gierke 2002 (1868); in the Benelux, see Prak *et al.* 2006; in the Nordic Countries, see Christensen 1931; Bisgaard 2001; Haugland 2012.

The scope of this paper is to examine the guilds' help for the deceased. What help could the guilds of late medieval and early modern Norway provide for their deceased members? How did the Danish-Norwegian Reformation of 1536 change the extent of this help? Were the guilds what the French historian Philippe Ariès has called institutions of death?¹⁵ The paper argues that helping deceased members was essential not only to the guilds of late medieval Norway, but also to the craft guilds founded after the Reformation,¹⁶ thus stressing a greater degree of continuity between the medieval guilds and the post-Reformation craft guilds than previous research has done. In Norwegian research, and in North European research on guilds in general, it was long held that the craft guilds were solely the economic and political bodies representing groups of craftsmen in the medieval and early modern towns, with few or no social and religious functions.¹⁷ While more recent studies, particularly over the last three decades, has shown that this no longer could be considered to be true when it comes to the late medieval craft guilds,¹⁸ it is still a widely held view about the early modern craft guilds in Norwegian research.

Furthermore, the paper argues for a basic continuity in the forms such help to the deceased might take, although the main focus of their help shifted from the late medieval focus on prayers and masses for the soul in purgatory to a focus on giving the deceased an honourable funeral.

15 Ariès 1991, 184–189.

16 Merchant guilds are, except for the Hanseatic merchant guild in Bergen, not known from early modern Norwegian towns.

17 See discussion in Haugland 2012, 32–38; also Blom 1960, 308–313; Ljung 1960, 302–305; Jacobsen 1980; Lindström 1991; Anz 1998; Bisgaard 2001; Black 2007.

18 Jacobsen 1980; Anz 1998; Bisgaard 2001; Haugland 2012.



Picture 1. Willem Vrelant: *Mass for the Dead*, early 1460s.

Guild statutes are the main source for the help guilds provided to deceased guild members. Few such statutes have survived from medieval Norway. Only nine medieval guild statutes exist today. Three of them belonged to guilds in the countryside: *Trøndelagsskråen*, dated to the second half of the thirteenth century, belonged to a guild in the district in Trøndelag;¹⁹ *Gulatingsskråen*, also dated to the second half of the thirteenth century, belonged to a guild in *Sunnhordland*, in the

¹⁹ *Trøndelagsskråen* was first published by Gustav Storm in 1896, Storm 1896, 217–225. For more on the dating of the statutes, see Haugland 2012, 52–61.

south of the county of Hordaland in Western Norway,²⁰ while *Onarheimsskråen*, dated 1394, belonged to St. Olaf's guild at Onarheim in Sunnhordland.²¹ The remaining six sets of statutes are from urban guilds, of which four were situated in Bergen: the 1412 statutes of the German shoemakers' guild;²² the statutes of the Hanseatic merchant guild or *Cunthor*;²³ the statutes of the St. Catherine and St. Dorothy's guild, which consisted solely of Hanseatic merchants at the Cunthor, dated to the first half of the fifteenth century;²⁴ and the 1529 statutes of the *skytningr* or guild of Jacobsfjorden and Bellgården, each being a row of houses that went from the docks by *Vågen* up to the *Øvrestræti*, a guild consisting of the people living in the two rows of houses.²⁵ A few more statutes have survived from craft guilds in the early modern period. From the Reformation to the craft guild reforms in Denmark-Norway in the 1680s and 1690s, when all existing guild statutes were annulled and new statutes given to all craft guilds within 41 different crafts in the Danish and Norwegian towns, 21 statutes from Norwegian craft guilds are preserved.²⁶

20 *Gulatingsskråen* was first published in *Norges gamle Love*, *NgL*, 1 R, V, 7–11. According to the German legal historian Max Pappenheim, the statutes belonged to a guild in the town of Bergen, but this has later been rejected by Gustav Storm, who concluded that the statutes must have belonged to a guild in Sunnhordland, a thesis that is widely accepted today. Oscar A. Johnsen has suggested that the statutes are an older version of *Onarheimsskråen* from 1394, but this thesis has not won support from other scholars; Pappenheim 1888, 36, 56; Johnsen 1920, 8; Blom 1984, 6.

21 *Onarheimsskråen* is published in *Norges gamle Love*, *NgL*, 1 R, V, 11–13.

22 *NgL*, 2 R, 1, no. 376.

23 The statutes, often called the *Statuta Vetera* (the old statutes), are dated to the beginning of the sixteenth century (*NgL*, 2 R, 2, no. 416. For more on the dating of the statutes, see Haugland 2012, 112, footnote 4). Statutes also exist from the two Hanseatic merchant guilds in Oslo and Tønsberg. The Hanseatic merchant guild in Oslo received sets of statutes from the town council of Rostock in 1378, 1420 and 1472 (*NgL*, 2, 1, no. 352 [1378]; 2, no. 424 [1472]). In addition, the two guilds in Oslo and Tønsberg received a common set of statutes from the town council in Rostock in 1452 (*NgL*, 2, 2, no. 403; also Haugland 2012, 110–111, 292–295).

24 The statutes were found and first published by Yngvar Nielsen in 1878 (Nielsen 1878, 4–10), and later in *Norges gamle Love* (*NgL*, 2, 1, no. 342) and *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* (DN XVI, no. 39).

25 Jacobsfjorden and Bellgården were each called a *garð*. In Bergen, a *garð* consisted of one or two rows of houses that went from the docks. There were several households in each *garð*. Each household had their own storage rooms, living rooms and bedrooms in the *garð*, as well as shares in the dock in front of the *garð*, the *eldhus* and the *skytningsstofa*, which all the households in *garð* the owned in common. There were over 30 such *garðs* at Bryggen in the late medieval period. By the middle of the fifteenth century, most of them were owned by German merchants. The Germans probably adapted the way the *garðs* were organized before the Germans became dominant at Bryggen. For instance, they kept the *skytningsstova*, which they called *schutstaven*, as an assembly hall where the members of the *garð* met regularly for social and religious gatherings, and kept dividing each *garð* into several households. Each of these *garðs* were organized as guilds, led by the leaders of each of the households in the *garð*, and with their own statutes, called *Gartenrechts*. The oldest *Gartenrecht* is the one from Jacobsfjorden and Bellgården, dated 1529, but copied from an older one. The *Gartenrecht* in Jacobsfjorden and Bellgården was published with a translation in *Bergen Historiske Forenings Skrifter* in 1895 (BHFS 1, 13–67). For more, see Helle 1982, 220–246, 738–742; Haugland 2012, 116–118.

26 Grevenor 1924, 120–140; Kjellberg and Stigum 1936, 339–344.

Of these, eleven were from craft guilds in Bergen, six from Oslo and two from Kristiansand and Trondheim respectively.²⁷

The focus on preserved guild statutes does of course mean that the discussion will mainly concern what help the guilds wanted to provide for their members, rather than what help they in fact did provide. This is because the main sources, and particularly when it comes to the Middle Ages often the only sources for the help guilds could provide its deceased members are the guild statutes. However, from the second half of the seventeenth century, the preserved statutes are to an increasing extent supported by guild records, accounts and other sources that makes it possible to see what help the guilds in fact did provide.

The discussion will mainly focus on the late Middle Ages and the period between the Reformation in 1536 and the Danish-Norwegian craft guild reforms in the 1680s.²⁸ For the medieval period, the paper will discuss the funeral arrangements in both urban guilds and guilds in the countryside. For the early modern period, the discussion will be limited to the towns, since few, if any guilds in the countryside survived the Reformation. In addition, the discussion will mainly focus on Bergen, the largest Norwegian town in the late medieval and most of the early modern period.

Intercession for the Dead: Guilds and the Late Medieval Culture of Death

Whenever a member of a medieval guild died, the other members were obligated to attend his or her funeral. The obligation comprised the whole of the funeral ritual. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the statutes from St. Catherine and St. Dorothy's guild in Bergen. Whenever a member died, the masters of the guild, which were called *schaffers*, would send out a message to the other members informing them of the coming funeral and instructing them to gather in the house of the deceased the evening before the funeral. There, in the presence of all the members, the deceased was laid on a bier and swathed in a cloth while a vicar recited prayers and gave him extreme unction. The ritual would continue during the night with vigils and a wake. From the statutes, it is difficult to determine whether

27 In Bergen, statutes are preserved for the goldsmiths' guild (1568), the bakers' guild (1597/1607, 1626, 1648), the barbers' guild (1597 and 1672), the tailors' guild (1605), the smiths' guild (1625), the shoemakers' guild (1635), the baker apprentices' guild (1641) and the coppersmiths' guild (1671). In Oslo, statutes are preserved for the tailors' guild (1607 and 1636), the smiths' guild (1671), the shoemakers' guild (1671) and the goldsmiths (1671–1673), in Kristiansand for the tailors' guild (1652 and 1658), and in Trondheim for the carpenters' guild (1657) and the shoemakers' guild (1662). See Kjellberg 1936, 64–65; Lindström 1991.

28 Grevenor 1924, 69–89; Kjellberg & Stigum 1936, 175–189.

all the members were to watch over the deceased, or if some of the members were elected to do so.²⁹

The burial ritual continued the next morning with a funeral procession from the house of the deceased to the church where the burial of the deceased was to take place. The St. Catherine and St. Dorothy's guild statutes describe a procession in which the bier with the deceased, which was carried by a number of members, was flanked by other members holding the finest of the guild's two canopies over the bier and twelve members carrying elevated processional torches.³⁰ The statutes do not reveal where burials of deceased members would take place. It is possible that they were at one of the two chantries the guild owned, either the St. Catherine chantry in the Franciscan convent church or the St. Dorothy chantry in the Dominican convent church, but it is also possible that they would take place in St. Mary's or St. Martin's, the two parish churches the guild members belonged to.³¹

When the procession had entered the church, the bier and the torches were placed on the church floor so that the torches still flanked the bier. The requiem mass followed, in which the soul of the deceased was commended to God. This was also to be held if a member had died abroad and no bier with the deceased could be carried to the church, since attendance at the mass was still obligatory, as if the member had died in the town.³² The requiem mass was to be followed by a small sermon by the guild vicar, before the vicar swung the censer over the deceased, sprinkled him with holy water, and read the relief prayer for the soul of the deceased.³³ Then a second procession followed, in which the members followed the bier with the deceased from the church to the grave. There the deceased was buried, accompanied by the reading of the benediction for the deceased, the singing of psalms and more prayers might be offered for the soul of the deceased.³⁴

29 Both kinds of arrangements are known from guilds in Danish and Swedish towns, Haugland 2012, 234–235.

30 *DN XVI*, no. 39, 35–36.

31 Helle 1982, 749–750; Haugland 2012, 224, 234–235.

32 *DN XVI*, no. 39, 35.

33 Johansson 1956, 415–417.

34 Johansson 1956, 415–416.



Picture 2. This deathbed scene (below) from the 1420s shows an angel and a devil fighting over the soul of the dying man, while a corpse is being buried in the central image.

In the rural guilds, whose members often came from different parishes or districts, it was probably more difficult to gather the whole guild when a member had died. The obligation to attend the funeral of a deceased member was therefore limited to members living in the same neighbourhood, parish or district as the deceased. For instance, if a member of St. Olav's guild at Onarheim had died, then those members that lived in the same parish as the deceased had to follow him or her to the grave and hear a mass for his or her soul. Those who did not were fined.³⁵

The funerals were financed in different ways. St. Catherine and St. Dorothy's guild in Bergen financed them through a fee the members paid each time a member

³⁵ *NgL*, 1 R, V, 12, art. 21. A similar provision is found in *Gulatingsskræen*, which states that if a member had died, his heir would cut a fiery cross and send it to the other guild members. Those who received the fiery cross, either had to attend the funeral, read a mass for his deceased soul or give a sum of money to the guild's funeral fund. Those who had not received the fiery cross were excepted from these duties (*NgL*, 1 R, V, 10, art. 34).

had died.³⁶ In other guilds, funerals were financed through the incomes from entrance fees, membership fees and fines. This appears to have been the case in St. Olav's guild at Onarheim, although the statutes do not mention it explicitly. In fact, they do not mention how it would finance funerals at all, confining themselves to declaring that the guild should provide for and finance deceased members' funerals. However, the only fees mentioned in the statutes are the entrance fee and the membership fee, and these, together with the fines mentioned for violations of the statutes, probably financed the funerals.³⁷

From the surviving statutes, it is evident that the guilds could provide for and finance the funerals for their deceased members. It was usually the family of the deceased that was expected to pay for the funeral costs whenever one of the family members died. That the guilds here filled a function usually exercised by the family shows how the ritual kinship of a guild created bonds of solidarity and community similar to that in families, and could expand or even replace the social safety net of the family that came to one's support when at the deathbed. This was particularly important in the towns, where many of the town dwellers, such as the German merchants and craftsmen in Bergen, did not have their own family as a social safety net, and thus did not have a family to provide for and finance funeral and masses for their souls if they died. The provisions stating that attendance at the funerals of members were obligatory shows how important the guilds considered this collective support for their members in death.

However, it also shows how guild funerals also had a public or communal aspect. The funerals were occasions at which the collective identity and wealth of a guild was put on display. It was therefore important that the guild show its best side at the funerals. This could be seen, for instance, in the statutes of St. Catherine and St. Dorothy's guild, which stress that the best canopy and twelve large torches were to be used in funerals.³⁸ Large torches were expensive, and four torches were considered as a minimum. Thus, St. Catherine and St. Dorothy's guild could afford to use twelve large torches in funerals shows clearly how the wealth of the guild was displayed in guild's funeral processions.³⁹

The guilds' help for deceased members did not end with the funeral, but continued after it with masses for the release of the soul of the deceased from purgatory.⁴⁰ This was possible either by founding a chantry or by taking over an already existing chantry in a church or a monastery. A chantry consisted of a side altar in a church or a monastery and a landed property large enough to cover

36 DN XVI, no. 39, 35. A funeral fee is also mentioned in *Gulatingsskråen*, but here the fee appears to be limited to those who lived in the same parish as the deceased (*NgL*, 1 R, V, 10, art. 34).

37 *NgL*, 1 R, V, 11–13.

38 DN XVI, no. 39.

39 For more on the use of torches in the medieval funeral ritual and for their use in the guilds, see Duffy 2005, 142–141; Bisgaard 2001, 63, 78–83.

40 The section is based on Bisgaard 2001, 105–147; Haugland 2012, 201–208.

the costs of having a priest singing masses. The priest was responsible for the maintenance of the side altar, but could also, if agreed upon between the guild that founded the chantry and the priest, sing masses for the souls of guild members and for others that benefited the guild or the guild chantry in their wills. Thus, the founding of a chantry made it possible for the guilds to provide help for the souls of the deceased members as well as the souls of any non-members that had left a bequest to the guild or its chantry. In fact, the Church from time to time called upon non-members to endow guild chantries, usually by promising indulgence for those who gave gifts to particular guilds or their chantries.⁴¹

There is evidence for guild chantries in the towns of Bergen, Marstrand, Nidaros, Oslo and Tønsberg in the late medieval period. A majority of the known guild chantries were situated in Bergen, which had ten known guild chantries.⁴² Guild chantries were founded by rural guilds as well. In the statutes of *Gulatingsskråen*, *Trøndelagsskråen* and *Onarheimsskråen*, the guild chantries are implicitly mentioned in provisions mentioning guild vicars and masses for the deceased.⁴³

As we have seen, it was customary to sing one or more masses for the deceased on the funeral day. Furthermore, masses for the deceased seven days and thirty days after the funeral were also customary, as well as on All Souls' Day and on the anniversary of the funeral. Such annual masses for the deceased are also mentioned in the guild statutes, but here it does not seem to have been normal to sing masses for the deceased on the anniversary of the funeral of each deceased member, but to have one or more annual masses for *all* deceased members. Whenever a member died, his or her name would be written down on a list or in book kept by the guild or the guild vicar. Such a list or a book is mentioned in the will of the Hanseatic merchant and *Bergenfahrer* Hinrik Kemenade from 1452. According to the will, Kemenade endowed the Corpus Christi guild in Bergen so that the guild would sing masses for his soul and have his name be written down in the guild's *denkelbuch*.⁴⁴

The names on the list would then be read and masses for their souls sung one or several times a year. The reason for this way of arranging the anniversary

41 Letters of indulgence are preserved for St. Anne's guild in Bergen (DN I, no. 1040 [1514]), the Corpus Christi guild in Marstrand (*Erkebiskop Henrik Kalteisens Kopibog*, 208 [1453]), the Corpus Christi guild in Oslo (DN II, no. 726 [1437]), and St. Nicholas's guild in Øystese (DN VIII, no. 410 [1482]).

42 For more on guild chantries in Bergen and Oslo, see Haugland 2012, 221–229. In Tønsberg, the St. Anne's guild had a chantry in the Franciscan convent church (DN IV, no. 409), while the town's St. Olaf's guild probably had a chantry in Lavranskirken, Johnsen 1929, 252. The Corpus Christi guild in Marstrand had a chantry in the Franciscan convent church, mentioned in 1453 (*Erkebiskop Henrik Kalteisens Kopibog*, 208). The existence of guild chantries in Nidaros is more directly mentioned, in two letters dated 1293 that mention guild vicars, which again implies the existence of guild chantries; DN III, nos. 34 and 35. There is also a possible reference to a guild chantry in Stavanger, mentioned in the will of Bishop Alf Thorgardssøn from 1478; DN IV, no. 987; Haugland 2012, 87, footnote 4.

43 NgL, 1 R, V, 7–11 (*Gulatingsskråen*), 11–13 (*Onarheimsskråen*); Storm 1896, 218–220 (*Trøndelagsskråen*). The same is implied in a letter mentioning help to the soul of the deceased in St. Nicholas's guild at Voss. The letter was published by Alexander Bugge (1917, 231–232).

44 Bruns 1900, 91, footnote 2.

masses for the dead was probably that it enabled all the living members to attend when the names of the deceased members were read and masses sung for their souls. That all the living members attended these masses was of great importance to the guilds; in fact, attendance was obligatory for all the guild members. The medieval guilds, like the medieval Christian community at large, were believed to consist of both the living and the deceased. This relationship, as we have seen, was summed up in the medieval funeral ritual, where the body of the deceased was brought to rest in a consecrated churchyard at the centre of a village or a town while the clergy offered prayers and masses for the soul of the deceased.⁴⁵ When the guild statutes insisted on the living members being present when the masses for the deceased were sung, it was because these masses were gatherings of the whole guild, celebrations of the community of the guild, both living and deceased.

For the same reasons, the masses for the deceased were usually a part of a larger guild gathering, such as the celebration of the guild's patron saint(s) or the guild's annual social gathering. The members of the St. Catherine and St. Dorothy's guild in Bergen were to meet for four annual masses for the deceased: the first one at the St. Catherine chantry in the Franciscan convent church on the second day of the feast of St. Catherine (25 November), the second at the St. Dorothy chantry in the Dominican convent church on the second day of the feast of St. Dorothy (6 February), the third at the St. Catherine chantry in the evening of the feast of St. George (23 April), and the fourth, again at the St. Dorothy chantry, during the *gildedrikk*, the annual social guild gathering. Attendance at the readings was obligatory. However, exceptions could be made for those that were unable to attend because they were abroad at the time.⁴⁶

It has to be noted, however, that at least two of the guild's readings were held in the winter, outside the sailing season, thus ensuring that most if not all the members were in the town when the readings were held. In rural guilds, it appears to have been usual to have an annual reading of masses for all deceased members during the *gildedrikk*. For instance, in St. Olaf's guild at Onarheim, which held its *gildedrikk* at the feast of St. Olaf, the guild vicar was to sing masses for the deceased in the church each evening during the *gildedrikk*. Furthermore, each evening the names of all deceased members would be read out in the guild hall and masses for their souls would be sung. On the last day of the *gildedrikk*, masses would be sung for all Christian souls and for all members that were alive, again marking the guild as a community of the living and the dead, where the living interceded for the souls of the deceased.⁴⁷

The guilds could also make agreements with monastic orders in order to ensure the singing of masses for deceased members. In 1409, the shoemakers' guild in

45 Koslofsky 2005, 2.

46 DN XVI, no. 39.

47 NgL, 1 R, V, 11–13. Daily readings of masses for the deceased is also mentioned in *Trøndelagsskråen* (Storm 1896, 219) and *Gulatingsskråen* (NgL, 1 R, V, 10).

Oslo made such an agreement with the Dominican order of the province of Dacia. According to the agreement, whenever a member of the guild died, the guild would notify the provincial chapter, so that all the Dominicans in the province could sing masses for the soul of the deceased shoemaker. In return, the guild would annually collect an amount of money to give the order, probably for the convent in Oslo.⁴⁸

The masses for the deceased were financed in various ways. They could be financed through gifts given by the members each time the members met to read masses for the deceased, as mentioned in *Trøndelagsskråen* and *Gulatingsskråen*,⁴⁹ through an annual fee on all the members, in *Onarheimsskråen* called *saala skoth*,⁵⁰ or through an obligation on all members to bequeath the guild an amount of money in their wills. Such an obligation is for instance known through the statutes of St. Catherine and St. Dorothy's guild. According to the statutes, all members had to bequeath the guild three *Lubecker* marks when writing their wills. If a member could not afford to make such a bequest, the guild would still read masses for his deceased soul. In such cases, the friends of the deceased should pay the three marks instead, or, if the friends were unable to pay, the reading of masses for his soul would be financed by the guild.⁵¹

The surviving guild statutes from medieval Norway, both the towns and the countryside, show how the guild was present beside the deceased member at all stages of the funeral ritual, helping the dying through his last hours, as well as on his way to the grave and in purgatory. The members watched over the dying guild brother in his last hours and between his death and the day of his funeral, arranged a funeral ale drinking in his honour and the funeral procession to his grave, followed him to grave, carried the bier with the deceased, prayed for his soul, covered the funeral costs and, after the funeral, the guild ensured that annual masses would be sung for the release of the deceased's soul from purgatory in the presence of all the living members. Thus, the statutes show how the Norwegian guilds were a part of the late medieval, Catholic culture of death, marked first and foremost by the doctrine of purgatory and the belief that the living could intercede for souls in purgatory through prayers, masses for the dead and letters of indulgence. Still, the guilds were not what the French historian Philippe Ariès called institutions of death.⁵² While it is true that the service of the dead was one of the main purposes of the medieval guilds, and some urban guilds were even founded mainly for the purpose of giving poor people or strangers a proper burial,⁵³ the service of the dead

48 *DN* VII, no. 350. The shoemakers made a similar arrangement with the Franciscans in 1407; *NgL*, 2 R, 1, no. 201.

49 Storm 1896, 219 (*Trøndelagsskråen*); *NgL*, 1 R, V, 10 (*Gulatingsskråen*).

50 *NgL*, 1 R, V, 11. St. Michael's guild at Voss appears to have had a similar arrangement; Bugge 1917, 232.

51 *DN* XVI, no. 39.

52 Ariès 1991, 184–189.

53 Bisgaard 2001.

was not the only purpose for founding a guild, and was never the sole purpose of a guild, as Ariès had suggested. As pointed out by Miri Rubin, Gervase Rosser, Susan Reynolds and Lars Bisgaard among others, as well as myself, the late medieval guilds usually filled a whole range of purposes, both socially, religiously, economically, judicially and politically, of which the service for the dead was one.⁵⁴

The Honourable Funeral: The Early Modern Craft Guilds and the Lutheran Culture of Death

The Reformation was introduced to Denmark-Norway in 1536, and a church ordinance for both countries came the following year. The church ordinance laid the foundation for the new Protestant church, declaring that the Danish-Norwegian king was the head of both state and church, that all Church property previously owned by the Catholic Church now belonged to the king, and contained provisions concerning the reorganisation of the church, the redistribution of the newly confiscated Church property, prohibitions on Catholic practises and expressions of Catholic belief, such as the cult of saints, vigils and masses for the dead, and provisions concerning the new, Protestant liturgy for the mass, the ordination of priests, weddings and funerals. The church ordinance also had a whole section on the guilds. According to the ordinance, incomes from guild chantries should no longer go to the guilds that owned the chantries. Instead, the incomes should be for the foundation of poor relief funds in the towns.⁵⁵ However, in 1540, King Christian III (r. 1534–1559) had already issued another decree concerning the guild chantries in the Danish towns, according to which, the incomes from these chantries were to go schoolmasters and teachers at the cathedral schools in the towns.⁵⁶

The church ordinance was first and foremost written with the Danish provinces in mind, and the decree of 1540 only concerned the Danish towns. However, the fate of guild chantries in Norway did not differ greatly from that of the guild chantries in Denmark: They were confiscated, and their incomes were redistributed for other ends. In Bergen, a prohibition on guilds was issued at the *bylagting* in 1544. It was also decided that the incomes from guild chantries in the town should partly be distributed to poor relief funds, and partly to finance restoration of the Cathedral.⁵⁷ In Oslo, the incomes from the chantries belonging to St. Anne's guild and the Corpus Christi guild had been redistributed to two clerks at the royal castle of Akershus by 1541.⁵⁸ Possible conflicts connected to the confiscation and redistribution of guild

54 Rubin 1993; Rosser 2006; Reynolds 2007; Bisgaard 2001; Haugland 2012.

55 *Kirkeordinansen av 1537*, V, 99–100.

56 Christensen 1931, 271–272, 278.

57 Bang 1895, 34–35; Haugland 2006, 91–93.

58 Haugland 2012, 378–379.

chantries is only found in Tønsberg. The incomes from St. Anne's guild's chantry first fell to the king in 1575, indicating that there had been conflict over the royal confiscation of the chantry and its property.⁵⁹

We know less about the fate of the guild chantries in the countryside. In the diocese of Bergen, the royal captain at the town castle, Christoffer Huitfeldt (1501–1559), and the newly appointed Lutheran bishop Geble Pedersøn (ca. 1490–1557) issued a prohibition on guilds in 1542. In addition, they decided that all guild halls in the bishopric, their inventories as well as other possessions belonging to the guilds were to be confiscated and sold, and that the incomes from the sale should go partly to poor relief in the countryside, partly to the leper hospital and the Cathedral in Bergen, and partly to the parish churches in the bishopric.⁶⁰ The prohibition does not however mention guild chantries, but it is likely that they, like other properties owned by the guilds, were confiscated and redistributed for different purposes, as they were in the town of Bergen. In 1552, a prohibition referring to and repeating the content of the one from Bergen dated 1542 was issued in the diocese of Trondheim, stating that guild halls and other possessions belonging to guilds in the bishopric, which probably included the guild chantries, were to be confiscated and sold, and their incomes redistributed.⁶¹ Prohibitions against guilds are not known from the other Norwegian bishoprics, but we can assume that similar prohibitions were issued there as well.

Few urban guilds and no rural guilds are mentioned in post-Reformation sources. Thus, it is likely that church ordinance from 1537 and the decrees issued in the 1540s and 1550s ordering the confiscation of guild chantries and guild halls, thus taking away the religious and social meeting places from the guilds, ultimately led to the dissolution of most Norwegian guilds. However, some urban guilds did survive the Reformation. In Bergen, at least seven of the German craft guilds as well as the Hanseatic merchant guild continued to exist. The Hanseatic merchant guild existed up to the 1760s, while the German craft guilds were dissolved in 1559, after a long conflict with the king and his representatives in the town.⁶² However, shortly after the dissolution of the German craft guilds, new craft guilds were

⁵⁹ *ARR*, 6, no. 89.

⁶⁰ Kolsrud 2007, 212–213.

⁶¹ *DN* XII, no. 636.

⁶² Fossen 1979, 52–69, 679–689.

founded,⁶³ often by and mainly consisting of German craftsmen, thus showing a strong element of continuity with the town's late medieval guilds.⁶⁴

The development in the other Norwegian towns in the second half of the sixteenth century does seem to be that of discontinuity, although the sources are too few and fragmented to make any certain conclusions. Shoemakers' guilds are known from Oslo, Trondheim and Tønsberg in the late medieval period,⁶⁵ but none of them are mentioned after the Reformation, and no new craft guilds are mentioned in the three towns before the turn of the seventeenth century.⁶⁶ During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, craft guilds were founded in other towns as well.⁶⁷ Altogether, 83 different craft guilds are known to have existed in Norwegian towns between the Reformation and the dissolution of all craft guilds in 1869.⁶⁸

All the craft guilds that survived the Reformation as well as the craft guilds that were founded in the late 1500s and during the seventeenth century, insisted, like their late medieval counterparts, on helping deceased members. However, as the Reformation had abolished purgatory and prohibited extreme unction and masses for the dead, making it no longer possible nor necessary to intercede for the dead, their help for deceased members was redefined from intercession for the deceased members to the funeral and in particular the funeral procession. This shift of focus is evident in the craft guild statutes from the second half of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, which concentrate solely on matters related to the funeral,

63 A goldsmiths' guild was founded in 1567, and in 1571, a new tailors' guild is mentioned for the first time. Furthermore, a barbers' guild and a bakers' guild are both mentioned in 1597, while a shoemakers' guild is mentioned in 1602, a coopers' guild in 1604, a brewers' guild in 1608 and a cutters' guild in 1614. Statutes for four of those guilds still exist: the 1568 statutes of the goldsmiths' guild (*DN XV*, no. 729), the 1597 statutes of the bakers' guild (*NRR IV*, 203–207), the 1597 statutes of the barbers' guild (Sollied 1931, 11–15) and the 1605 statutes of the tailors' guild (*NRR IV*, 111–116). The other four guilds are also said to have had statutes, but these no longer exist (*NRR IV*, 70 (the carpenters); 185 (the shoemakers) and 252 (the brewers); Lindström 1991, 248 (the cutters).

64 For instance, most founders of the new goldsmith's guild in 1568 were German goldsmiths. Furthermore, a copy of their statutes dated 1596, which used to hang on a wall in the guild hall, is written in German (Bøgh 1893, 15–19), while their record book was written in German from 1568 to 1690 (Grevenor 1924, 216). Other examples are the surviving seal from the bakers' guild dated 1598, and from the shoemakers' guild dated 1602, both with inscriptions in German (Grevenor 1924, 146, 166).

65 The shoemakers' guild in Oslo is first mentioned in 1304 (*DN II*, no. 74), the shoemakers' guild in Tønsberg in 1395 (*DN IV*, no. 649), while the shoemakers' guild in Trondheim is mentioned in 1370 (*NgL*, 2 R, 1, no. 99).

66 In Oslo, a shoemakers' guild is mentioned in 1600, a goldsmiths' guild in 1604 and a tailors' guild in 1607 (Kjellberg & Stigum 1936, 40; Lindström 1991, 76). In Trondheim, the first post-Reformation craft guild to be mentioned is the bakers' guild, first mentioned as late as 1633, Kjellberg & Stigum 1936, 64. In Tønsberg, craft guilds are not mentioned at all in the early modern period.

67 Craft guilds were founded in Bragernes, Kongelv, Kristiansand, Skien, Stavanger and Strømsø in the seventeenth century, and in Arendal and Fredrikshald in the eighteenth century; Grevenor 1924; Kjellberg & Stigum 1936.

68 Grevenor 1924; Kjellberg & Stigum 1936; Fossen 1979. Their numbers could have been even higher. According to Stigum, there were apprentices' guilds in all the crafts that had a master's guild. Since there are known 62 master craft guilds, but only 21 apprentices' guilds, the total number of craft guilds in early modern Norway could be well over a hundred (Kjellberg & Stigum 1936, 201). Not all the craft guilds existed until the dissolution of all craft guilds in 1869. According to a registration of existing craft guilds in Norway in 1839, there were 45 craft guilds that year; Grevenor 1924, 136–140.

including obligatory attendance at the funeral and the funeral procession, how to select members to carry the bier with the deceased, and how to finance a members' funeral. To help the deceased meant to follow him to the grave, and the members' obligations to the deceased ended when the graveside ceremony had ended. This is clear in the 1607 statutes from the tailors' guild in Oslo stating that the members were obliged to "follow and to help the deceased in his funeral and to his grave".⁶⁹

The 1636 revision of the statutes is slightly more detailed, stating that it was the responsibility of the alderman to gather the members when a member had died, and to choose which members were to carry the bier with the deceased in the funeral procession.⁷⁰ Similar provisions are also found in the statutes from Bergen. For instance, according to the 1597 statutes from the barbers' guild, all members had to attend when a master or an apprentice in the guild had died. Those who did not attend were fined.⁷¹ The 1605 statutes from the tailors' guild states that if a member died, all members were to attend his funeral, and the youngest master tailors were to carry the bier with the deceased. Those who did not attend, and those who left the church before the deposition was over, were fined.⁷²

The guild members' obligation to attend at funerals also included the funerals of wives, servants, children and others that belonged to the households of the masters,⁷³ which shows how the members of the masters' households were included in the solidarity of the craft guild to which the master belonged. The 1568 statutes from the goldsmiths in Bergen stated that "if any of our guild brothers or sisters, apprentices, servants or children dies, then those who do not follow the deceased to his or her grave, shall pay a fine of eight shilling."⁷⁴ The 1635 statutes from the shoemakers in Bergen stated that if any of their craftsmen, their wives, children or others in their households died, then all the guild brothers were obliged to attend the funeral. Only sick members were excused from attending. Those who did not attend, or left the funeral before the graveside ceremony was over, were fined. It was the responsibility of the youngest master to notify and gather the members when a member or someone in the member's household had died.⁷⁵

69 *NRR* IV, 177, art. 26: "[...] at følge og hjelpe den afgangne ærligen til sin Begravelse og Leiersted."

70 Those who were chosen, but refused to do so, were fined. Sick and old members were excepted from carrying the bier; Grevenor 1924, 251, art. 35 and 36.

71 Madsen & Sollied 1931, 15, art. 14. A similar provision is found in a revision of the statutes from 1672; Carøe 1921, 20.

72 *NRR* IV, 114, art. 9.

73 See the 1568 statutes from the goldsmith's guild in Bergen (*DN* XV, no. 729), the 1625 statutes from the smiths' guild in Bergen (Deichman, fol. no. 13, art. 21), the 1626 and 1648 statutes from the baker's guild in Bergen (Deichman, fol. no. 13, art. 10–11; *NRR* IX, 56, art. 14), the 1635 statutes from the shoemakers' guild in Bergen (*NRR* VII, 114, art. 12), and the 1636 statutes from the tailors' guild in Oslo (Grevenor 1924, 241, art. 35).

74 *DN* XV, no. 729: "*Bliffuer och nogenn aff wore Embitzbrødere eller Søstere, suenne, drennge eller Barnn dødt, huilcken ther icke da følger thenn døde tiill sin leigerstædt, schall haffue forbrott ottehe skellinge*". My translation.

75 *NRR* VII, 114, art. 12.

The importance of obligatory attendance at the funeral procession was connected to the importance of giving deceased guild members a *Hederlig Jordeferd*, an honourable funeral, an expression made explicit in several of the guild statutes.⁷⁶ A large procession, of which the members would make up a significant part, from the house of the deceased to the grave, would make up what was considered an important part of an honourable funeral; thus, it was considered important that all the members take part in the procession. In addition, to attend another's funeral was considered to be an act of good Lutheran charity, or as the Norwegian Church ordinance from 1607 puts it, the last good deed or favour one Christian could give to another.⁷⁷

The guild statutes' emphasis on the honourable funeral was much in accordance with the notions of Martin Luther and the other leading reformers, as well as with the new Lutheran funeral ritual, as described in the Danish-Norwegian church ordinance from 1537 and the Norwegian church ordinance from 1607. Luther justified the display of secular honour in funerals by linking it to the promise of resurrection as a consequence of salvation by faith:

For it is meet and right that we should conduct these funerals with proper decorum in order to honour and praise that joyous article of our faith, namely, the resurrection of the dead, and in order to defy Death, that terrible foe who so shamefully and in so many horrible ways goes on to devour us. [...] Here also belong the traditional Christian burial rites, such as that the bodies are carried in state, beautifully decked, and sung over, and that tombstones adorn their graves. All this is done so that the article of the resurrection may be firmly implanted in us.⁷⁸

The same understanding of the Lutheran funeral is found in the church ordinances from 1537 and 1607, which laid the foundation of a new Lutheran culture of death in Denmark and Norway.⁷⁹ Whenever someone died, it was, according to these ordinances, the duty of his or her friends or family to prepare for an honourable funeral, and to notify the priest, the parish clerk, the sexton and the schoolmaster so that they all could make the necessary preparations for the funeral. However, the family and friends of the deceased were not allowed to watch over the deceased between the time of his or her death and the time of the funeral, nor was it allowed to invite people to the house for a gathering or for drinking, as this

76 The expression is found in the statutes from the bakers' guild in Bergen from 1626 and 1648 (Deichman, fol. no. 13, art. 10–11; *NRR IX*, 56, art. 14), the statutes of the smiths' guild in Bergen from 1625 (Deichman, fol. no. 13, art. 21), and the statutes from the shoemakers' guild in Bergen from 1635 (*NRR VII*, 114, art. 12).

77 *Kirkeordinansen av 1607*, 54: "*De Dødis Begræffuelse er regnit iblant Miskundelige gierninger*". The Church law of 1537 and the Norwegian Church law of 1607 both define attendance at funerals as a charitable act.

78 Cited from Koslofsky 2005, 93–94.

79 The following section is based on the chapters on funerals in the Church laws of 1537 and 1607; *Kirkeordinansen av 1537*, 72–73; *Kirkeordinansen av 1607*, 54–57. See also Fæhn 1994, 147–151; Amundsen 2005, 213–243.

was considered to be a Catholic practice. In accordance with this, the early modern craft guild statutes do not mention a wake or drinking. This does not necessarily mean that they did not arrange wakes or drinking. On the contrary, from the many prohibitions issued against such practices in the towns and countryside alike in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Norway, it is likely that the early modern craft guilds continued the medieval practices of watching over deceased members and arranging drinking in their honour.⁸⁰



Picture 3. The death of Virgin Mary as depicted by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) set an example of how to stage a Good Death in the best *ars moriendi* fashion. It also demonstrates what a busy place a deathbed could be.

According to the Danish and Norwegian church ordinances, the funeral itself was to start when the church bells started tolling, but the two laws stressed that the tolling did not mark the beginning of the deceased soul's journey to purgatory,

⁸⁰ Fæhn 1994, 149. The prohibitions did not seem to have any effect. The practice continued in many parts of Norway into the nineteenth century, Amundsen 2005, 178.

as it was believed to be in the late medieval Catholic funeral, but was intended to wake up the living, and to remind them of their own death and the promise of their salvation and resurrection by faith. As the church bells started tolling, in towns with a school and a school pupils' choir, the schoolmaster and the school pupils were to start walking to the house of the deceased. When they had come to the house, they would start singing psalms, thus marking the start of the funeral procession. The choir would also lead the procession with the bier with the deceased through the streets to the church or the churchyard and the grave of the deceased, accompanied by the ringing of church bells. The tolling of church bells and the participation of family, friends, neighbours, the priest, the school choir and, in the case of the craft guilds, of the deceased guild member's brethren, gave the funeral procession a public or communal character. It was the urban community's farewell to the deceased. Furthermore, it was considered an honourable procession, taking the bier with the deceased in state, beautifully decked, as Martin Luther put it, from his house to his grave.

The funeral was to end with a graveside ceremony, where the priest sprinkled earth on the bier carrying the deceased while the choir and the parish sang psalms, followed by a short sermon – here both church ordinances urged the priests to preach about penance and conversion – before all would kneel beside the grave and pray that they all might maintain their faith.⁸¹

When the graveside ceremony was over, the members had no further obligations towards the deceased. However, the craft guild statutes were also concerned, as were the medieval guild statutes, with how to ensure that all their members, including poor, sick and old members, could be given a proper funeral. In cases where a member was too poor, sick or old to pay for his or her own funeral, the craft guild would step in and finance the funeral, thus ensuring that he or she would be given just as proper a funeral as any other member.⁸² This was financed in different ways. In the tailors' guild in Bergen, funerals were financed through a fee called *tidegjeld*, and according to its 1605 statutes, the members had to meet four times each year to pay the fee.⁸³ In the tailors' guild in Oslo, the funerals were partly financed through the entrance fee. Whenever a new member was admitted, he had to pay a fee that partly went to the alderman, partly to the clerk who had written

81 During the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the small sermons held in the funerals of people from the top stratum of society became more and more extensive, and came to deal more with the life of the deceased, often portraying him or her as a role model of the life of a good Christian, than with penance and conversion. Koslofsky, who has looked at funeral sermons in early modern Germany, has argued that by the sixteenth century, the funeral sermon had become the most significant element of the Lutheran funeral liturgy; articulating both doctrine and honour, consolation and prestige, they had become the culmination of a ritual focused on the living and the honour that their dead brought them; Koslofsky 2005, 107–114. For more on the funeral sermons as a literary genre in early modern Norway, see Stensby 1996; Gilje and Rasmussen 2002, 183–201.

82 See the 1625 statutes of the smiths' guild in Bergen (Deichman, fol. no. 13, art. 21), the 1626 and 1648 statutes of the bakers' guild in Bergen (Deichman, fol. no. 13, art. 10–11; NRR IX, 56, art. 15), the 1635 statutes of the shoemakers' guild in Bergen (NRR VII, 114, art. 12), and the 1636 statutes of the tailors' guild in Oslo (Grevenor 1924, 241, art. 35).

83 NRR IV, 113–114, art. 8.

the name of the newcomer in the guild book, partly to the guildhall and partly to “the help and comfort of old and poor brothers and their wives and to give them a funeral when they die.”⁸⁴ The tailor apprentices in Oslo had their own sick and funeral fund, to which all the members paid an annual fee.⁸⁵

The Lutheran funeral ceremony, as well as the craft guilds’ participation in its various stages, shows many elements of continuity with the late medieval requiem mass and the role of guilds in the late medieval funeral. In particular, the Lutheran funeral shows a basic continuity in form, with its communal procession from the home of the deceased to the church or the churchyard, led by the clergy, the funeral hymns, the funeral sermon, the tolling of church bells and burial among the Christian dead.⁸⁶

The continuity is also seen in the participation of the guild in the stages of the ritual. Like their late medieval counterparts, the members of an early modern craft guild were with the deceased through all the stages of the funeral, including the funeral procession and the graveside ceremony. The guild arranged that selected guild members carried the bier with the deceased in the procession, and the guild could finance the funeral if the deceased or his relatives were too poor, sick or old to do it themselves. It is even likely that the craft guilds continued the late medieval practice of watching over deceased members and arranging drinking in their honour, although the practice was prohibited repeatedly by the Danish-Norwegian authorities during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the Lutheran funeral and the guild participation also marked a break on one vital point, the intercession for the dead. Whereas the service for the dead in the late medieval period continued after the funeral with the prayers and masses for the dead seven days and thirty days after the funeral and from then on annually on the anniversary of the death, the service for the dead in the Lutheran funeral stopped with the graveside ceremony. Thus, although showing continuity in form, the focus in the Lutheran funeral had shifted, from the dead to the living, from the intercession for the dead to the honourable funeral.

The Decline of the Communal Funeral and the Privatisation of the Funeral Ritual?

In the 1680s, attempts were made by the Danish-Norwegian state to change the Lutheran funeral ritual as well as the funeral arrangements in the craft guilds in both countries. Most important was the attempt to limit the extent and the splendour of the funeral procession, thus marking the beginning of a decline in the communal funeral.

84 Grevenor 1924, 245, art. 5: “[...] *At Komme gamble och fattige forarmede Embidts Brødre Och Deris hustruer Thill Hielp och Trøst saa och At bestedis thill Jord med naar de Wed døden Bortkalldis.*” My translation.

85 Grevenor 1924, 249, art. 23.

86 Koslofsky 2005, 94.

In 1681, a royal decree tried to limit the obligation to attend craft guild members' funerals to those who had been appointed to carry the bier with the deceased to the grave.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the decree prohibited members from meeting at other places than the house of the deceased, and then only for the funeral procession. This prohibition probably attempted to prevent that the craft guilds gathering for a wake in the house of the deceased before the funeral or in their guild halls for drinking after the funeral. The decree also prohibited the craft guilds from notifying others than the parents, children and siblings of the deceased whenever a member had died. This too marked a break with the craft guilds' funeral arrangements, which made it normal for the alderman or the youngest of the master craftsmen to notify all the members of a member's death, so that all the members could attend the wake, the funeral and the drinking for the deceased.

The decree from 1681 must be seen in connection with a general decree on funeral arrangements that came out the following year, which limited the number of people who were allowed to attend the funeral procession, and repeated the prohibitions on wakes and drinking in honour of the deceased. The decree also stated that no one except for the family of the deceased were to be notified of his or her death.⁸⁸ The reason for the decree was theological. The funeral processions, the decree argued, had become too large, filled with too much splendour and luxury, focusing too much on the honour of the deceased, and too little on the living, their penance and salvation. Limitations therefore had to be imposed on the number of people that took part in the procession, and the deceased should no longer be honoured with a choir of school pupils singing psalms in the procession. Instead of attending the house of the deceased, the choir now was to meet in the church where the funeral ceremony was to take place.⁸⁹ Interestingly, the decree of 1682 also mentions nocturnal funerals, which were only allowed after royal approval had been given.⁹⁰

As Koslofsky has pointed out, by 1700 the majority of funerals in the towns and cities of Lutheran Germany took place in the evening or night. In the exclusive nocturnal funerals, he argues, the tension between Christian worship and the display of social status had shifted in favour of the latter, which opened the way for the family to replace the Christian community as the framework of the funeral in the longer term, and the funeral to become a more private family ritual.⁹¹ It is uncertain how widespread nocturnal funerals became in Norwegian towns, but the possibility of funerals being held in the evening or at night, together with the limits

87 Smith 1823, 34–40, Kjellberg & Stigum 1936, 176.

88 *Forordning om Begravelser, Hafniae die 7. November Anno 1682*, KD VII, no. 31, art. 8, 12; also Stensby 1996.

89 *Forordning om Begravelser, Hafniae die 7. November Anno 1682*, KD VII, no. 31, art. 20; also Fæhn 1994, 150.

90 *Forordning om Begravelser, Hafniae die 7. November Anno 1682*, KD VII, no. 31, art. 14.

91 Koslofsky 2005, 133–152, 159.

imposed on the funeral processions could, as in German towns, very well have been the beginning of the end of the communal funeral and the privatisation of the funeral ritual.

The royal decrees from 1681 and 1682 were followed by a number of statutes issued for all craft guilds within a single craft in Danish and Norwegian towns during the 1680s and 1690s. The limits in the decree on the obligation to attend the funerals of deceased members, is found in the 1685 statutes for the goldsmiths' guilds, for those in Bergen, Oslo and Trondheim among others. According to the statutes, "if a Master, his wife, children, apprentices, servant or servant girl die, then the alderman of the guild shall point out as many as is needed from the guild to carry the bier with the deceased to the grave".⁹² Thus, in accordance with the 1681 and 1682 decrees, there was no general obligation for the guild members to attend the funerals of deceased members, the obligation being limited to those who were appointed to carry the bier.

We do not know whether the Danish-Norwegian state succeeded in its attempt to limit the number of guild members that attended at the funerals of deceased guild members, but considering that it no longer was obligatory to do so, it is likely that it did, thus contributing to the decline of the communal funeral. However, we do know that from the end of the seventeenth century onwards, the craft guilds were no longer alone in offering the carrying of the deceased to the grave. The 1682 decree prohibited the custom of taking payment for the carrying of the deceased, and decided that only those who had been given a licence to carry the deceased by the town council were allowed to take payment for the carrying.⁹³ It is probable that the prohibition was directed at the craft guilds, who could have offered the carrying of the deceased to non-members for payment. At least the craft guilds had had experience with carrying the deceased, and they owned the equipment needed in funerals, such as a bier and torches.⁹⁴

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, and partly as a consequence of the decree from 1682, funeral clubs were founded in several Norwegian towns, the first being founded in Trondheim in the 1680s.⁹⁵ The funeral clubs had their own statutes, sanctioned by the town council, and were often given a monopoly on the carrying of the deceased to the grave for payment within the town. Like the craft

92 *Guldsmed-Laugs Artikler, Hafniæ die 7. Novembr. 1685*, art. 23: "Naar nogen Mester, hans hustrue, Børn, Svend, Dreng eller Pige ved Døden afgaaer, Da skal Oldermændene lade af Lauget tilsige, saa mange som behøves, efter ordentlig Omgang at bære Liget til Jorden." Similar provisions could be found in the 1685 statutes for the button-maker's guilds (*Knapmager Laugs Artikler. Hafniæ die 7. Novembris Anno 1685*, art. 16) and the coppersmiths' statutes dated 1744 (Ryttvad 2010, 24, art. 25).

93 *Forordning om Begræffelser, Hafniae die 7. November Anno 1682, KD VII*, no. 31, art. 12.

94 Lorrance 1935, 309.

95 In Christiania, the first funeral club, *Det store kjøbmænds liig-laug*, was founded by a group of merchants in 1686, while the first funeral club in Bergen, *Studenter-Socitetet*, was founded by a group of academics in 1697. Funeral clubs were also founded in Strømsø (1713), Halden (1723), Kristiansand (1731), Arendal (1740), Bragernes (1759), Molde (1785) and Moss (1800), Lorrance 1935, 309–314. For more on the merchants' funeral club in Christiania, see Hoffstad 1931, 244–252.

guilds, the funeral clubs aimed at giving their members an honourable funeral by providing financial support for their funerals and by using the funeral equipment owned by the clubs at the funerals of their members. Many of them were probably founded by craftsmen not organized in guilds or by several small craft guilds that otherwise were unable to ensure financial support for their members' funerals or carrying them to the grave.⁹⁶

The craft guilds, although their members were no longer obligated to attend deceased members' funerals after the craft guild reforms in the 1680 and 1690s, continued the late medieval practice of providing financial support for the funerals of their members'. Although no such support is mentioned in the common statutes issued for many craft guilds in the 1680s and 1690s, they all mention funds for internal poor relief. It is likely that these funds were in reality funds partly for the support of poor guild members, and partly for providing financial support for their members' funerals. Such combined funds were quite normal in the surviving guild statutes from the first half of the seventeenth century, and they are mentioned in the law from 1839, although much later, concerning crafts in Norway, which states that all craft guilds were to have their own funds for providing financial support for poor and sick members as well as for the funerals of deceased members.⁹⁷

Some craft guilds even founded their own funeral clubs to ensure that their members were given financial support to their funerals. In 1690, the 24 masters of the shoemakers' guild in Bergen founded *Skomagerlaugets Dødelade* to make sure that the masters were given "an economic contribution for a decent civic funeral." The foundation had its own statutes, and its accounts were written in the foundation's own account book, but matters concerning the foundation and its accounts were to be decided by the shoemakers' guild, and all the masters as well as their wives were to become members of the new foundation. The members were to pay a weekly fee to the foundation, which was to be paid to an appointed steward of the foundation. Whenever a master or a wife of a master died, it was the steward's responsibility to pay a funeral contribution to the widow or widower. The size of the contribution depended on how long the deceased had been a member.⁹⁸

Later, probably after the dissolution of the shoemakers' guild in 1869, but before the issuance of a new set of statutes in *Skomagerlaugets Dødelade* in 1883, membership was opened up to others than master shoemakers and their wives. According to the foundation's new statutes from 1883, "[e]veryone that have

96 For instance, in 1768 the carpenters' guild and the smiths' guild in Trondheim agreed on carrying their deceased members to the grave together, since "in both guilds no longer are [there] Masters enough to carry their deceased members to the grave"; Lorrance 1935, 308: "[...] i begge laugene nu ei ere saa mange Amts-Mæstere, at de hver særdeles kan borbære sine avdøde". My translation.

97 Grevenor 1924, 136–140.

98 The statute is found in one of the foundation's record books, which is kept in the Department of Special Collections at The University Library of Bergen (*Skomagerlaugets dødelade. Fortegnelse 1690-1890*). Similar foundations were founded by the button-maker's guild in Bergen in 1791, of which the statutes are kept in the Department of Special Collections (*Et Liig Fundas for Knapmagerlaugets Mestre*), and the coppersmiths' guild in Bergen in 1859, which existed until 1897. The foundation's statutes have been published by Ryttevad (2010, 101–106).

been given citizenship as a master shoemaker in this town, can become members. Likewise, membership can also be given to other master craftsmen, apprentices and other honourable men and women not being sailors or belonging to the class of wage-earners".⁹⁹ In addition, the statutes demanded that new members be over the age of 30, and that they have a certificate from a doctor proving that they were of good health. All members had to pay an entrance fee and an annual membership fee. After fifteen years as members, unmarried members were exempted from paying the membership fee, while married couples were exempted only after thirty years. The statutes from 1883 mention that a steward, as in 1690, was in charge of the foundation, and that it was still the steward's responsibility that funeral contributions be paid when members died, but now the foundation also had three managers and a paid auditor which, together with the steward, constituted the executive of the foundation. The three managers were to be elected at a general meeting which, after the dissolution of the shoemakers' guild in 1869, was the supreme organ of the foundation. The paying of funeral contributions was to take place the day after the steward had received the message that a member had died, and as in 1690, the size of the contribution would vary depending on how long the deceased had been a member.¹⁰⁰ The last entries concerning paid funeral contributions in the foundation's accounts are dated 1910. The foundation itself was formally dissolved five years later, in 1915.¹⁰¹ With it, the last remains of the guilds' help for deceased members, the financial support to their funerals, had disappeared.

Conclusion

This article argues that helping deceased members was essential not only for the guilds of late medieval Norway, but also the craft guilds founded after the Reformation, thus stressing a greater degree of continuity between the medieval guilds and the post-Reformation craft guilds than previous research has suggested. Furthermore, this essay argues for a basic continuity in form in the various elements of which the help to the deceased consisted, although the main focus of their help shifted from the late medieval focus on prayers and masses for the soul in purgatory to a focus on giving the deceased an honourable funeral. As shown in the surviving guild statutes from medieval Norway, the members of a guild were obligated to participate in the wake and follow their deceased members to the grave, cover their

99 *Skomakerlaugets dødelade, 8. Fortegnelse 1690-1890*: "Enhver, der har erhvervet Borgerskab som Skomakermester her i Staden, kan [...] blive optagen som Medlem. Ligesaa skal der være Adgang for andre haandværksmestere, samt Svende og andre ordentlige Mænd og kvinder, der ikke ernære sig som Søfarende og ei heller henhøre til Daglønnerklassen, at blive optagne som Medlemmer." My translation.

100 *Skomakerlaugets dødelade, 2. Forhandlingsprotokoll 1851-1892*.

101 *Skomakerlaugets dødelade, 3. Forhandlingsprotokoll 1892-1906*.

funeral costs and read masses for their souls' salvation from purgatory, for which many guilds founded chantries in churches and monasteries.

The help for the deceased was partly financed through entrance fees, membership fees and fines, and partly through fees paid at the funerals or when the members gathered to hear masses for the souls of the deceased. This assistance was rooted in the Christian norm of *fraternitas* or brotherhood, to treat each other as brothers and sisters. The funeral arrangements did however also have a more practical function, providing the guild members with a social security net that gave them a feeling of certainty that when they died, they would be given an honourable funeral by the guild, and they would be prayed for by the living guild members for eternity.



Picture 4. The priest blesses a corpse to its grave in this mid-fifteenth-century image. It also shows how the coffin could only be used for the transportation of the corpse to the burial site.

Most of the guilds that existed in Norway in the Middle Ages appear to have been dissolved during or in the decades that followed the Danish-Norwegian Reformation of 1536. However, the few urban guilds that survived the Reformation and the new craft guilds that were founded in Norwegian towns during the second half of the sixteenth century and during the seventeenth, continued to provide help for deceased members. Like the medieval guilds, the early modern craft guilds covered the funeral costs of their members, the funeral equipment owned by the craft guilds was used in members' funerals, and the craft guild members were obligated to attend the funerals of their fellow craftsmen, their wives, apprentices, children, and servants. Furthermore, the funeral costs were financed in the same way as in the medieval guilds, partly through entrance fees, membership fees and fines, and partly through fees paid by the members at the funerals. To help the deceased continued to be important for the craft guilds until their dissolution in 1869, and in some cases, as in that of the shoemakers in Bergen, it even outlasted the guild itself.

However, the early modern craft guilds not only continued to help their deceased members, their help seem to have been rooted in the same Christian norm of brotherhood. This could be seen in the guild statutes from the early modern period which, like the statutes of the medieval guilds, often describe the social bonds between the members through the use of family analogies. For instance, in 1568 the statutes from the goldsmiths' guild in Bergen the members are called *Embitzbrødre* (brothers) and *søstre* (sisters), the 1672 statutes from the barbers' guild call their members *amtsbrødre*, *lavsbrødre* and *embedsbrødre*, while the 1607 statutes from the tailors' guild in Oslo call their members *brødre*, *søstre*, *laugsbrødre* and *gildebrødre*.¹⁰²

While such family analogies are found in most of the preserved guild statutes from the second half of the sixteenth century and for most of the seventeenth,¹⁰³ few such references are found in the statutes issued during the craft guild reforms of the 1680s and 1690s. This difference might be explained by the fact that most of the statutes dated before the craft guild reforms were compiled by the craft guilds themselves and then sanctioned by the town council or the Danish-Norwegian king, while the statutes issued during the craft guild reforms were provided by the king. Thus, it was the craft guilds themselves who used the family analogies to describe the social bonds between the members, and who called themselves brothers and sisters. Furthermore, the craft guilds themselves continued to use family analogies

102 *DN XV*, no. 729 (the goldsmiths in Bergen); Carøe 1921 (the barbers in Bergen), *NRR IV*, 174–179 (the tailors in Oslo).

103 See the 1568 statutes of the goldsmith's guild in Bergen (*DN XV*, no. 729); the 1597 and 1672 statutes of the barbers' guild in Bergen (*NRR IV*, Carøe 1921); the 1625 statutes of the smith's guild in Bergen (Deichman, fol. no. 13); the 1626 and 1648 statutes of the baker's guild in Bergen (Deichman, fol. no. 13; *NRR IX*), the 1635 statutes of the shoemakers' guild in Bergen (*NRR VII*); the 1641 statutes of the baker apprentices' guild in Bergen (University of Bergen Library, Department of Special Collections. Ms. 167–70. De bergenske laugsarkiver. Bakerlauget. 6); and the 1607 and 1636 statutes of the tailors' guild in Oslo (*NRR IV*; Grevenor 1924).

after the craft guild reforms as well. For instance, the glassmasters' guild in Bergen called itself a brotherhood in 1801,¹⁰⁴ while the shoemaker apprentices in Bergen called themselves *Skoemagersvendenes Broderskab* (the brotherhood of the shoemaker apprentices) as late as the 1830s.¹⁰⁵

The continuity between the medieval guilds and the early modern craft guilds, as far as the help they provided to their deceased members is concerned, also had consequences for the understanding of the early modern craft guilds. It has been customary to define the craft guilds as the artisans' economic and political organisations, with few or no social or religious functions. However, as shown in this essay, it is rather the other way around. The social and religious functions, exemplified by the funeral arrangements, were essential to the early modern craft guilds, as they were in the guilds in late medieval Norway.

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104 Bøgh 1904, 44.

105 Grevenor 1924, 173.

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Post Mortem – an Afterword

Ditlev Tamm

University of Copenhagen

When Epicurus (Greek: Epikouros, 341–270 B.C.E.) told us centuries ago that we need not be concerned with death, because when we are there, death is not there, and when death comes, we will not be there any more,¹ he gave us to understand that life should be enjoyed even if we know it will be short. Life and death are complimentary, but one should not exclude the other. The idea of life overcoming death is essential for the understanding of Christianity. At the same time, the conviction that *mors omnia vincit* has been an important guideline for humankind in understanding that death also means that there is an end and that life must be lived on that premise.

Attitudes towards death in different cultures and at different times are still fascinating subjects, which have been the object of vigorous and often very interesting research for decades. The history of death is the history of human attitudes towards death as it is reflected in art, literature, religion, and law. For former generations death was always present and coping with death was a part of everyday life. In many ways, it is like this today in that poverty, terror, and catastrophes on the media confront us with death. Looking at exotic death rituals can be part of a tourist trip abroad and churchyards still attract visitors. However, looking directly at death in this way does not convey the idea of vanity and that nothing will last forever in the same way as the traditional image of the man with the scythe. Death in the modern world has changed its meaning. It is no longer seen as the logical fulfilment of life but more as an absurd interruption which can even bereave life of its meaning, instead of giving it meaning. Studying death in a historical perspective, including the understanding of the aesthetics of death and the confrontation with the idea of dying as an art, mastered by former generations, may contribute to a dialogue on death which accepts it as something natural. The *mors omnia vincit* in this way becomes a saying based on a deep understanding of the human condition.

1 “Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not. It is nothing, then, either to the living or to the dead, for with the living it is not and the dead exist no longer.” Letter to Menoeceus, published in Hicks (ed.) 1910, 169.



Picture 1. Albrecht Dürer's (1471–1528) *Knight, Death and the Devil* belongs to the *memento mori* genre. Death awaits the high and mighty as well as the poor and whether they will belong to the Devil or not depends on the actions of the individual rather than his or her position in life.

The history of death is the story of how mankind has endeavoured to cope with the reality of death; not hiding it but looking at it as something natural which you actually have to master. Confronting death is the last exam and, if you master it, it may well serve as a model for others. The death of Socrates (ca. 470–399 B.C.E.) as described by Plato (ca. 428–347 B.C.E.) in the dialogue *Crito* or the way in which other individuals whose last moments have been recorded as exemplary may serve us as examples of how to die. The history of death and attitudes towards death throughout history are thus matters which allows us to understand not only cultures of the past but also our own culture better. To pursue research on this theme is to contribute to social history but also to a better understanding of changing conditions and anxieties in the world today.

The present author published a book on the history of death in 1992 under the title *The Triumph of Death*.² As is well known, it was Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304–1374) who coined this expression in the fourteenth century under the depredations of the plague. My inspiration, apart from possible personal motives, came from the inspiring French research into the history of attitudes and behaviour. Names like Ariès,³ Vovelle⁴ and Chaunu⁵ had taken new paths in research into the Middle Ages and modern times in the 1970s and 1980s by stressing exactly how much could be learned from studying attitudes towards death. At the same time, a historian like Richard Cobb by skilfully using official documents from the coronial inquests in his book on death in Paris from 1978 could tell new stories of people who had chosen to commit suicide at the time of the French Revolution by throwing themselves into the Seine.⁶ In 1987, Richard J. Evans took us to death in Hamburg explaining how the cholera epidemic in the nineteenth century still caused havoc in a civilized society.⁷

I was deeply impressed by such books and my intention was to investigate whether ideas from this research might be helpful in understanding attitudes towards death in a Nordic country like Denmark. In fact, one of the oldest Danish written laws, the law of Scania, begins with: “If a man has a wife, and she dies before the child is born.”⁸ The reality of death is clearly reflected in the old medieval laws. The first time death was mentioned in a Danish text it was in order to lay down its legal consequences. Medieval laws often tell small concentrated stories, as does the Church Law of Scania from around 1171 in which we read about “a man who lies on his deathbed and gives his property to God.”⁹ This new idea of giving something for the soul was an important novelty in medieval society, which caused many conflicts between legal heirs and the Church.

Nordic laws are also an important source for Anne Irene Riisøy in her study on dead outlaws in medieval Norway in this book and their exclusion from a Christian burial. She takes as her starting point that certain crimes were considered morally reprehensible and that denial of burial was a concomitant of the general repudiation of such crimes, which were mostly those committed in a cowardly and concealed way and without notifying anyone after the deed. Riisøy thus uses the source material to combine reflections on death and death rituals with legal history.

2 Tamm 1992.

3 Ariès 1977.

4 Vovelle 1983.

5 Chaunu 1978.

6 Cobb 1978.

7 Evans 1987.

8 Author's translation from the original text of the Law of Scania (ca. 1200), *Danmarks gamle landskapslove med Kirkelovene*. Vol. 1:1, Ch. 1, 1.

9 *Danmarks gamle landskapslove med Kirkelovene*. Vol. 1:2, Ch. 5, 834.

Norwegian sources are much richer than the Danish medieval laws in terms of Church law and rules on burials, and thus give a much more detailed picture of how various views of death intersect in old Norse society, including when people who were excommunicated were denied burial. In the present volume, Beata Wojciechowska also stresses the importance of the Christian Church in the Middle Ages for its attitudes associated with death and funerals, and she also refers to the research of figures like Ariès and Vovelle. She deals with the clash between Christianity and traditional pagan concepts of the afterlife and how rituals for the remembrance of the dead were actually fused into Christian belief and considered as efficacious.

The idea of the afterlife as depicted by Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) in his *Divine Comedy* from shortly after 1300 makes a tremendous impression, quite different from the places for repentant souls described by Wojciechowska. The idea of Purgatory, which is such an important feature of Dante's geography of the world beyond death is a curious and interesting phenomenon studied by Jacques Le Goff.¹⁰ As mentioned, death is an important theme for Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374) in his *Triunfi* of about 1340. His contemporary Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) wrote his famous collections of short stories, *Il Decamerone*, about a group of young people trying to flee death outside Florence.¹¹ How difficult it could be to avoid fate if you were actually destined to die is depicted in tremendous pieces of art in the Campo Santo of Pisa and other places. These pictures show death as an invincible force that may snatch us away at any moment. The other side of death, parental grief, is treated in this volume by Viktor Aldrin who, in opposition to Philippe Ariès, stressed that the emotions of mourning, especially for children, actually did exist in the Middle Ages and were not only accepted or visible later as proposed by Ariès. Aldrin's source material is taken from accounts of the saints and their miracles, in which grief is mentioned as one of the phases of bereavement. He also shows how reactions to the sudden death of a child were especially strong.

Protestantism did not necessarily lead to a radically different attitude. Money could still be bequeathed to ecclesiastical institutions or the poor. In the sixteenth century, however, the funeral monuments for royal personages or noblemen also become more imposing until ordinances on luxury in the seventeenth century called for a certain modesty. Eivor Andersen Oftestad has analysed a late medieval Danish poem, *De Vita Hominis*, with the aim of showing continuity and change in the economic and spiritual investment in the afterlife in the time before and after the Lutheran Reformation. She shows how after the Reformation, this late medieval work was formed by A.S. Vedel (1542–1616) to introduce a new way of seeing the afterlife. Instead of depending on intercessions from others, faith showed during one's life became central. How the Reformation actually meant a change is also illustrated in the article by Håkon Haugland on the guilds and death and funerals

¹⁰ Le Goff 1981.

¹¹ Boccaccio 1972 (1348–1353), trans. McWilliam.

in Norway in the late Middle Ages and early modern times. Such guilds in the late Middle Ages played an important role, one of which was helping their deceased members. Assistance with funerals continued after the Reformation. However, the Reformation changed the framework within which the guilds worked, and although they continued to help in situations of death they lost their importance, albeit gradually.

What perhaps impressed me the most when writing my small book in the 1990s was the study of the sermons preached by leading Danish clerics from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when distinguished members of noble families had passed away. An extended description of the last days and hours of the deceased was part of composing such a funeral sermon. People with whom conversations were held, the quotations from the Bible which were referred to by the dying, last words and the dignified attitude towards death were recorded and pointed out. The art of dying, *ars moriendi*, thus became a popular theme and death and the way to face it became a genre of its own. Reading such descriptions may be comforting even today. The Swedish King Charles X Gustav (1622–1660, r. 1654–1660) is another example. As a “soldier and a scholar”, he could quote extensively from the *Aeneid* (ca. 30 B.C.E.) of Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.) just the day before he died in 1660 from an attack of fever, depicting how Aeneas visited the realm of death and was told that to come back from there was the most difficult art: “*Hoc opus, hic labor est.*” It was the King’s doctor who related the last days of the King and how two days before he died he had said, confronted with the possibility that he might not survive but die: “*Ad utrum que paratus sum.*”¹²



Picture 2. The German David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl (1629–1698) who became the famous Swedish court painter, immortalised King Charles (Karl) XI of Sweden (1655–1697) on his *lit de parade* in 1697. King Charles XI, only child of King Charles X Gustav, died a lingering death of cancer at the age of 41 after a reign of 35 years.

¹² Önnerfors 1987.

From the top of society we virtually descend into the underworld when it comes to Iris Ridder's article in this volume on the oracle games used by the miners in Falun in Central Sweden at the beginning of the seventeenth century. She describes how miners used dice to decide where to work in the mine and thus how playing a game was a means not only of making decisions but also a strategy to avoid chance and randomness by casting lots and let the decision be taken by Him who in the end was considered the master of fate.

The articles in this volume are concentrated on themes from the Middle Ages and early modern period. The story of death however goes on. Death as a penalty and the discussion of the effectiveness of the death penalty that started in the eighteenth century when the Italian Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794) challenged the death penalty in his *Dei Delitti e delle pene* of 1764 is another aspect of attitudes towards death.¹³ The culture of churchyards and the modern idea of having burials not in the church or in city graveyards but outside also show new attitudes since the end of the eighteenth century. The horror of suspended animation leading to being buried alive also stems from this time. In the nineteenth century, we encounter the attitude that death shall be denied and that the patient should be maintained in the belief that they will recover as long as possible. A famous short masterpiece by Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), *The death of Ivan Ilyich* from 1886, tells the story of a Russian judge who realizes during an extended struggle with death and the idea that he is actually dying in the end that life is over, that he is “done for, there was no way back, the end was here, the absolute end [...]”¹⁴ The story in many ways reflects an attitude completely the reverse of the one we met when kings and noblemen died their exemplary deaths in the seventeenth century.

An important contemporary discussion is voluntary euthanasia when further medical treatment seems both painful and useless. In the medical language, death is still “*mors*” and a clinical concept. As this rich collection of articles shows, historians have other ways at looking at a phenomenon which – even if Epicurus tried to convince us of the contrary – is always there. In the sixteenth century, Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) wrote that “all philosophical reflection had to do with the preparation for death,” even stressing how death was the final goal of our life.¹⁵ The complementarity between the two notions is obvious when we look at customs, attitudes and laws concerning death. The articles in this volume show that when we as historians take up death and attitudes towards it as an investigation of “some aspects of the medieval and early modern mentalities related to death and what expressions the cultures of death took in Europe,” we visit a rich field with an abundance of fascinating concepts which add substantially to our knowledge not only of death but also of life in the past.

¹³ Beccaria 1984 (1764).

¹⁴ Tolstoy 2006 (1886).

¹⁵ “[L]et us learn bravely to stand our ground, and fight him. And to begin to deprive him of the greatest advantage he has over us, let us take a way quite contrary to the common course. Let us disarm him of his novelty and strangeness, let us converse and be familiar with him, and have nothing so frequent in our thoughts as death,” quoted from Montaigne's essay “That to Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die,” in Hazlitt (ed.) 1877 (1580), Book I, Chapter XIX.

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List of Contributors

Viktor Aldrin is Associate Fellow of Research at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies at Lund University. He holds a doctorate in Religious Studies and Theology (2010) and has been recognised as an Excellent Teaching Practitioner, ETP (2015). Aldrin has written a monograph in religious studies on lay religiosity, *The Prayer Life of Peasant Communities in Late Medieval Sweden* (2011), and several articles on professional ethics.

Håkon Haugland is a historian and a researcher at the University of Bergen. He defended his doctoral thesis at the University of Bergen in 2012 on the subject of guilds in the medieval Nordic towns. His main field of research is the history of guilds in the Nordic countries, but his research also includes other topics in urban history and church history. Among his publications are several articles on the subject of guilds and the book *Dypvåg kirke* (2012) on a medieval parish church in the south of Norway.

Mia Korpiola is Professor of Legal History at the University of Turku. She has published *Between Betrothal and Bedding: Marriage Formation in Sweden, 1200–1600* (2009). She has also edited the books *Regional Variations in Matrimonial Law and Custom in Europe, 1150–1600* (2011), *The Svea Court of Appeal in the Early Modern Period: Historical Reinterpretations and New Perspectives* (2014) and co-edited the book *Authorities in the Middle Ages: Influence, Legitimacy, and Power in Medieval Society* (2013) together with Sini Kangas and Tuija Ainonen.

Anu Lahtinen is currently acting as University Lecturer in Finnish and Nordic history at the University of Helsinki. She is Adjunct Professor (Docent) in Finnish History at the University of Turku and in Finnish and Nordic History at the University of Helsinki. She has published and edited numerous articles and books on medieval and early modern social and cultural history, often with a focus on gender history in the Nordic societies.

Eivor Andersen Oftestad is a church historian currently working as a postdoctoral fellow in the project “Death in Early Protestant Tradition” at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo. In her doctoral thesis *The house of God: The translation of the temple and the interpretation of the Lateran Cathedral in the twelfth century* (2010), she analysed how the Lateran Cathedral in Rome was perceived and represented in the twelfth century after the First Crusade.

Iris Ridder is Associate Professor at the University of Dalarna in Sweden. She defended her doctoral thesis in comparative literature in 2002 on the subject of a thirteenth-century Latin text, *Dialogus Salomonis et Marcolfi* and its late medieval vernacular translations, mainly focusing on the Swedish version from the seventeenth century. Ridder is currently working on a monograph on the use of games in the medieval and late medieval Swedish mining society of Falun and its mining enterprise, Great Copper Mountain (*Stora Kopparberget* in Swedish).

Anne Irene Riisøy is Associate Professor of History and Social Sciences at Buskerud and Vestfold University College in Norway. Her main research interest is legal history. At present, she works on Viking Age outlaws and outlawry. A revised version of her doctoral dissertation, *Sexuality, Law and Legal Practice and the Reformation in Norway*, was published by Brill in 2009.

Ditlev Tamm is Professor of Legal History at the University of Copenhagen. He has published extensively on many aspects of Danish and European legal history, political history, and cultural history. His many books and articles in several languages include biographies, studies on the history of legal science, ballet, literature and collaboration during World War II, in addition to a book on death in Western Europe from the Middle Ages until the present (*Dødens triumf: mennesket og døden i Vesteuropa fra middelalderen til vore dage*, 1992).

Beata Wojciechowska is Professor of History at the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland. She received her doctorate in 1997. Wojciechowska has published a book on annual rites in the traditional Polish folk culture of the Middle Ages and another on excommunication in medieval Poland. She specialises in the religious and legal culture of late medieval Poland.



List of Illustrations

Cover

Master of the *Chronique scandaleuse* (French, active about 1493–1510): *Denise Poncher before a Vision of Death*, about 1500, Tempera colors, ink and gold on parchment. Leaf: 13.3 x 8.7 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 109, fol. 156. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Introduction, *Mia Korpiola and Anu Lahtinen*

Picture 1. Unknown maker, German: *The Virgin and Saint John, from a Crucifixion*, ca. 1420, Dark brown vitreous paint, coloured pot metal and clear glass, silver stain, 58.5 x 50 x 1 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 2. Unknown painter: *Wheel of Fortune*. Fifteenth-century wall painting, Church of Birkerød, Denmark. Photo by Mia Korpiola.

Picture 3. Master of the Dresden Prayer Book or workshop (Flemish, active about 1480–1515): *The Three Living and the Three Dead*, about 1480–1485. Tempera colours and gold on parchment, 20.5 x 14.8 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 23, fol. 146v. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 4. Master of Guillaume Lambert (French, active about 1475–1485): *Burial*, 1478 (based on date included in Easter calculation). Tempera colours, gold paint, and iron gall ink on parchment bound between pasteboard covered with brown jansenist morocco. Leaf: 14.6 x 9.8 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 10, fol. 116. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

The Remembrance of the Deceased in the Traditional Polish Culture of the Middle Ages, *Beata Wojciechowska*

Picture 1. Bernardo Cavallino (Italian, 1616–1656): *The Shade of Samuel Invoked by Saul*, about 1650–1656. Oil on copper, 61 x 86.4 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 2. Workshop of Gerard Horenbout (Flemish, 1465–1541, active 1487–ca. 1520): *Initial G: Souls in Purgatory*, ca. 1500. Tempera colours and gold paint on parchment, 15.2 x 11.1 cm. The Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig IX 17, fol. 67. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 3. Taddeo Crivelli (Italian, died ca. 1479, active ca. 1451–1479): *Initial D: A Skull in a Rocky Field*, ca. 1469. Tempera colours, gold paint, gold leaf, and ink on parchment. Leaf: 10.8 x 7.9 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig IX 13, fol. 106. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Deviant Burials: Societal Exclusion of Dead Outlaws in Medieval Norway, Anne Irene Riisøy

Picture 1. Unknown: *A Massacre of Family Members*, about 1460–1470. Tempera colors, gold leaf, gold paint, and ink on parchment. Leaf: 17.6 x 11.4 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 68, fol. 21. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 2. Decapitation scene from a French history of Alexander the Great, a version of the *Gesta Alexandri Magni* by Quintus Curtius Rufus. Anonymous miniaturist, ca. 1470s. Tempera colours, gold paint and ink on parchment. Book collection of Skokloster Castle, Sweden. With the kind permission of the Skokloster Collection, Sweden – thanks to Monica Sargren.

Picture 3. Follower of Hans Schilling (German, active 1459–1467) from the Workshop of Diebold Lauber (German, active 1427–1467): *Burial Scene*, 1469. Ink, coloured washes, and tempera colors on paper, 28.6 x 20.3 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig XV 9, fol. 123. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 4. Agostino dei Musi, called Veneziano (Italian, ca. 1490–after 1536) after Rosso Fiorentino (Italian, 1494–1540): *Allegory of Death and Fame (or The Skeletons)*, 1518. Engraving, 31.3 x 51.1cm. Yale University Art Gallery, 1966.94. With the kind permission of the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

Parental Grief and Prayer in the Middle Ages: Religious Coping in Swedish Miracle Stories, Viktor Aldrin

Picture 1. Attributed to Anovelo da Imbonate (Italian (Lombard), active around 1400): *The Mother of Allegranzia Appealing to Saints Aimo and Vermondo to Save Her Child*, about 1400, Tempera colors, gold leaf, and ink on parchment. Leaf: 25.6 x 18.4 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 26, fol. 8v. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 2. Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (Dutch, 1621–1674): *Hagar Weeping*, early 1640s. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 68.6 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 3. Posthumous portrait of Hannibal Gustav Wrangel af Salmis (1641–1643), age 16 months, on his *lit de parade*. Anonymous German painter, 1643. Oil on canvas, 91.0 x 78.0 cm. Skokloster Castle, Sweden, 11690. With the kind permission of the Skokloster Collection, Sweden.

Picture 4. Attributed to Anovelo da Imbonate (Italian/Lombard), about 1400: *Leone Otasso and His Wife Presenting Their Sick Son to Saints Aimo and Vermondo*. Tempera colours, gold leaf, and ink on parchment. Leaf: 25.6 x 18.4 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 26, fol. 9. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 5. Attributed to Anovelo da Imbonate (Italian/Lombard), about 1400. Tempera colours, gold leaf, and ink on parchment. Leaf: 25.6 x 18.4 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 26, fol. 9. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

**Transforming the Investment in the Afterlife: Readings of the Poem *De Vita Hominis* in Pre-Reformation and Post-Reformation Denmark,
Eivor Andersen Oftestad**

Picture 1. Workshop of Gerard Horenbout (Flemish, 1465–1541, active 1487–ca. 1520): *Initial O: A Woman on her Deathbed with the Virgin and Child and Devils*, about 1500, Tempera colours and gold paint on parchment. Leaf: 15.2 x 11.1 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig IX 17, fol. 54. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 2. Follower of Hans Schilling (German, active 1459–1467) from the Workshop of Diebold Lauber (German, active 1427–1467): *The Last Judgment*, 1469, Ink, coloured washes, and tempera colors on paper, 28.6 x 20.3 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig XV 9, fol. 93. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 3. Unknown: *Purgatory*, illustration from *Der Seelen-Wurzgarten*, 1483. Woodcut, handcoloured, 24.6 x 17.3 cm. Yale University Art Gallery, 1985.29.2. With the kind permission of the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

Picture 4. Master of Sir John Fastolf (French, active before about 1420–about 1450): *Mass for the Dead*, about 1430–1440. Tempera colours, gold leaf, and ink on parchment, 12.1 x 9.2 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 5, fol. 170v. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Dicing towards Death: An Oracle Game for Miners at the Falun Copper Mine from the Early Seventeenth Century, *Iris Ridder*

Picture 1. Title page, Gisle Jacobson, *A small pastime (Ett litet Tidhfördriff)*, Stockholm 1613. With the kind permission of the National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

Picture 2. Oracle game text, Gisle Jacobson, *A small pastime (Ett litet Tidhfördriff)*, Stockholm 1613. With the kind permission of the National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

Picture 3. Mine map of Stora Kopparberget (*Karta över Stora Kopparberget*), Hans Ranie, 1683. Photography by Birger Roos. With the kind permission of Stora Enso AB's archive, Archive Centre in Dalarna, Sweden.

Picture 4. Jacques Callot (French, 1592–1635): *La pendaison (The Hanging)*, 1633. Engraving 11 in the series “Les Misères et les Malheurs de la Guerre” (“The Miseries and Misfortunes of War”). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

“To Help the Deceased Guild Brother to His Grave”: Guilds, Death and Funeral Arrangements in Late Medieval and Early Modern Norway, ca. 1300–1900, *Håkon Haugland*

Picture 1. Willem Vrelant (Flemish, d. 1481, active 1454–1481): *Mass for the Dead*, early 1460s. Tempera colours, gold leaf, and ink on parchment. Leaf: 25.6 x 17.3 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig IX 8, fol. 189. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 2. Spitz Master (French, active about 1415–1425): *A Burial*, about 1420, Tempera colors, gold, and ink on parchment. Leaf: 20.2 x 14.9 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 57, fol. 194. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Picture 3. Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471–1528): *Death of the Virgin*, from *The Life of the Virgin*, 1510. Woodcut, 29.6 x 21.1cm. Yale University Art Gallery, 1956.16.2r. With the kind permission of the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

Picture 4. Workshop of the Bedford Master (French, active first half of fifteenth century): *A Burial*, about 1440–1450. Tempera colours, gold leaf, gold paint, and ink on parchment, 23.5 x 16.4 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. Ludwig IX 6, fol. 133. With the kind permission of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Post-Mortem – an Afterword, Ditlev Tamm

Picture 1. Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471–1528): *Knight, Death and the Devil*, 1513. Engraving, 24.4 x 18.8 cm. Yale University Art Gallery, 1925.59. With the kind permission of the Yale University Art Gallery.

Picture 2. David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl (1629–1698, German, active in Sweden) and David von Krafft (1655–1724, German, active in Sweden): *Posthumous portrait of King Charles XI of Sweden (1655–1697, r. 1660–1697) on his lit de parade*, 1697. Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 71.5 cm. Skokloster Castle, Sweden, 11733. With the kind permission of the Skokloster Collection, Sweden.

List of Contributors

Godfried Maes (Flemish, 1649–1700): *Man on his Deathbed with Priest and Others*, n.d. Brush and gray ink and gray wash, 18.1 x 14.4cm. Yale University Art Gallery, 1961.64.45. With the kind permission of the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.